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G.R. SHOLAPURKAR

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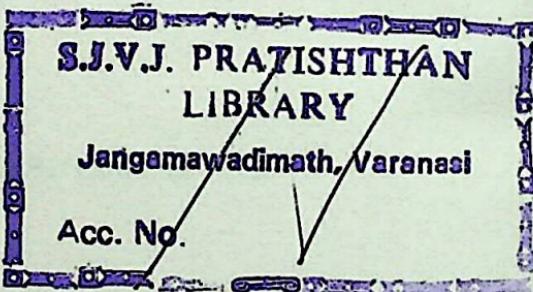
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***DEDICATION***

To the revered memory of my father  
**Pandit Ramakrishna Vasudeo Solapurkar**  
**(1875-1959)**



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## INTRODUCTION

Before writing the first book, *Foot-prints at Shirdi and Puttaparthi*, I had intended to write about the Saints and Sages of India as they appeared in various states. I could take up this work only after completing the second book.

India is known as a land of mystics. It is said to be the cradle of ancient wisdom and culture preserved in the Vedas and other religious scriptures. The first-ever poet was Sage Valmiki who wrote the epic *Ramayan*. The snow-capped mountains, Himalayas, are not only the highest in the world, but have revealed the existence of many caves and grottoes where many saints and sages spent years in meditation. Elsewhere in this country also exist such mountainous caves used for similar purpose. Why are these far and distant places chosen? One explanation could be that they are away from the disturbance and din of the crowds in towns and cities. The other reason could be due to the purity of the atmosphere, peace and tranquility and availability of natural food like fruits etc and water from springs. They are all conducive to the aspirant longing for spiritual enlightenment.

What can be the purpose of studying the lives of these saints? India is a peculiar mixture of the old and new, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, and above all exploiters and the exploited. Its nuances are as infinite as its precepts. We often speak of tradition and culture. Both these are projections and extensions of the past. Fundamentalism and pragmatism co-exist in this land. A country so vast, has many diversities such as dresses, languages manners and customs. But nearly eighty per cent of the population lives in villages and country-side. The spiritual fall-out can be seen amongst these people who may be poor or illiterate.

Teachings and lives of saints and sages form a valuable part of our heritage. The saints included great thinkers, intellectuals, singers, musicians, poets and composers. Their approach was different but the quest for Truth was common. They were drawn and devoted to a particular form of the Lord and sang his glory. They were votaries of their point of view and often differed. In the south, this cleavage is very pronounced and the cult of Bhakti or devotion took different names. Adherents of Lord Vishnu were called Vaishnavites and bore perpendicular or vertical bars on their foreheads. Devotees believing in the supremacy of Lord Shiva were called Shaivites and had horizontal lines on their foreheads. Worship of a particular form soon developed as a cult and sharp differences often appeared on the surface.

The Shaivites often leaned towards intellectualism whereas votaries of Lord Vishnu were devoted to either Lord Ram or Lord Krishna, the two major 'Avatars', according to Hindu belief. It is not possible to identify Truth unless it is associated with a particular form or shape. Major Avatars like Ram and Krishna or the Cosmic Energy represented by Mother Kali draw millions as Their worshippers. The 'Intellectuals' belonging to the other school often preached that Truth could only be perceived through meditation. It should be interesting to state here that the East and West have differed greatly on this subject. According to the Eastern school, knowledge was born out of intuition, by introspective thinking and by inspiration. The Western school says that knowledge is born out of rational thinking, reason and logic, and the approach has to be objective. The other school preaching 'Bhakti' or devotion preached worship of the Lord in many of the nine forms mentioned in the Shrimad Bhagwat. But Vaishnavites or Shaivites, they were all votaries of Truth and believed in His transcendence and Immanence. They all decried the myth that the body was the real 'I', and said that God has to be discovered within and not searched outside. Whether it was Ram or Rahim, Krishna or Karim, they were only different names and the indwelling spirit was the same. Scientists in the west have the same opinions. They are also seekers of truth though their methods are different. This is what Alexis Carrol, the Nobel Prize

winner in Medicine has to say, "Before believing or denying, one must carefully examine the facts. Science must remain on guard against any excessive tendency towards credulity but it is also the duty of science not to neglect facts, simply because they are extra ordinary and science is unable to explain them."

The word 'sage' is derived from Latin 'sapere', meaning a 'man of great wisdom'. The word 'Saint' is derived from Latin 'sanctus' and means 'holy', and thus signifies a 'holy person, eminent for his virtues.' The Sanskrit word 'Sunt' ('U' pronounced as in 'shut') similarly means a person who has a view endowed with universality and makes no distinction of caste, colour or creed. Saints and sages, as such, have shown a catholicity of attitude towards all human beings. They preached equality. Saints belonged to all communities and the 'so-called' Shudras' produced many eminent saints who through their devotion rose to the highest point of sainthood. Women saints also appeared as great devotees seeking Truth in their own inimitable way.

Thaumaturgy has always been misunderstood and often derided, even though miracles have been associated with saints as a mark of their occult powers. They have cured persons suffering from serious diseases, granted boons to the needy and often predicted the nature of coming events. They have been known to do things that have defied known laws of nature or science. Much controversy has surrounded such persons. The current example is that of Sathya Sai Baba whose miracles are incredible. Scientists, parapsychologists from the West have visited his Ashram and witnessed these miracles, but have failed to explain them. I think, that these God-men function at unknown levels and dimensions and their acts are not susceptible to laboratory tests. But miracles have also occurred elsewhere and no country or religion should claim their exclusive possession.

The miracles at Lourdes are well known throughout the world. Bernadette was born on 7.1.1844 and died on 16.4.1879. Her body is buried in the Convent of Nevers. Thirty years later, the body was taken out and found in excellent condition. It was canonised and placed in a new

coffin and grave. On 8.12.1933, the day of Immaculate Conception, she was proclaimed a 'Saint' by Pope Pius XI. The body lies in a glass casket and is open for public view. A similar instance of the body of St. Xavier at Goa is also noteworthy, as it has also shown no signs of decay. Alexis Carrol, the eminent Nobel Prize Winner in Medicine has declared his belief in the miracle at lourdes.

The book deals with the lives and philosophy of over seventy saints. It lays no claim to being a complete list. The reason is simple. Every village, town or city will point to some person or persons living in their midst who are called saints and possess great occult powers. They have healed many incurable diseases and foretold the coming events with a remarkable degree of accuracy. the number of such person will into thousands. In a work like the present one, it is not possible to include all or everyone. Saints like Sathya Sai Baba or Mother Teresa have also not been included. Their work is continuing and may be, much has yet to be revealed. The book is therefore, merely a compendium of the lives and work of some saints and is no work of any research.

This land has been acting as a lodestar drawing many persons from every corner of the world who want to study mysticiem and meet people gifted with occult powers. They want to witness that science has been unable to explain. Such highly evolved persons have refused to appear before committees or organisations for exhibiting their powers, as if they are in need of any certificate or testimonial. Genuine investigators are always welcomed. In the West much research is being doen to unravel the mysteries and it is hoped that , one day, they will successfully explain the inexplicable.

In the end, I must express my gratefulness to Shri R.S. Bhandari for his valuable help and guidance. All the proof-reading, as in the past, has been done by him. My thanks are also due to the Publishers for publishing and printing the book.

C-2D, Janakpuri,  
New Delhi.

G.R. SHOLAPURKAR

1.

## **NORTHERN REGION**

**(Kashmir, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi)**



## SANT KABIR

As in the case of many saints, nothing definite is known about Kabir's birth or his parents. According to one legend he was born to a Hindu Brahmin widow, who abandoned the baby to hide her shame. He was picked up by Niru, a Mohammedan weaver and given to the care of his childless wife Nima. His date of birth is not certain and many theories have been advanced. Mr Westcott has given an opinion that he lived for 78 years, and according to Mauliffe he was born in Samvat 1455 corresponding to year 1408 A.D. and died in 1518 A.D. Thus his life span was 120 years. Mr Westcott differs and says that Kabir was born in 1440 A.D. and died in 1518 A.D. Dr Bhandarkar, the eminent orientalist, however, accepts the dates given by Mauliffe.

Thus, though born a Hindu, Kabir had all the early education and guardianship by a Muslim. He helped his father in his weaving profession. Even as a child, Kabir showed his leanings towards Hindu philosophy. It is said that Ramanand, who lived towards the close of the fourteenth century and died in the early part of fifteenth century, was a great Vaishnava saint. He was, however, of a different type and had great affection for members of the lower strata of society. It is said that he was approached by Kabir for being accepted as his disciple, but refused. Ramanand, however, used to go to the Ganga for his early bath; and one day Kabir stretched himself on one of the steps. Being a misty dawn, Ramanand did not see him till his foot knocked against his body. His immediate explanation was "Ram" "Ram", when he found that he had struck against a human boy. Kabir stood up and prostrated before the Master and declared that with a touch of the Master's divine feet, he had already been initiated and accepted as a disciple. Ramanand was moved by this show of devotion and accepted Kabir.

This was, of course, not liked by the Mohammedan community, who hurled all kinds of abuses and threats. But Kabir continued with the adoration of his Master and never

for once swerved from the path he had chosen. Kabir regularly attended the discourses by his Master and joined him in his disputations with the local Pandits about spiritual matters. For some time Kabir lived in Manikapur, about which he has written in one of his *Ramainis*, as his poems came to be known. There he heard about the fame of Sheikh Taqqi and other fakirs. In one of the books, Sheikh Taqqi is represented as being hostile to Kabir, because he considered his philosophy and teachings as blasphemous and contrary to Koranic precepts.

Kabir was a simple, unlettered man and earned his living at the weaver's loom throughout his life. He had a son and a daughter named Kamal and Kamali. He gave discourses on spiritual matters and members of both the communities listened to him in rapturous attention. He was mystic of the highest order. For him Ram was the over-lord of the universe. Not the Ram, son of Dashrath, but the Parabrahma, who was the creator, preserver and destroyer. He decried all narrow parochialism. His remarks were often blunt and biting, but his listeners felt that he was speaking the truth and at heart had no intention of hurting their religious sentiments. His compositions have been called *Ramainis*. They have been the subject of much research by scholars. Pandit Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, the eminent Hindi scholar, has written extensively about him. Here are a few translations of the *Ramainis*, as given in the book, '*Vaishnavism Saivism*' by the eminent orientalist Dr R.G. Bhandarkar. It must be stated that *Ramaini* is a piece of composition consisting of several 'Chaupais' (Sanskrit 'Chaturpadi') and are stanzas consisting of four lines with the ends of the first two rhyming with each other; and a *Sakhi* (which is another species of metre) at the end.

### **First Ramaini:**

1. There was in the inside a substance called Jiva, or individual soul, the internal light illuminated.
2. And then followed a woman in the name of desire and she was called Gayatri.
3. That woman gave birth to three sons, Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh.
4. Then Brahma asked the woman,

who was her husband and whose wife she was. 5. She replied "Thou and I, I and thou, and there is no third. Thou art my husband and I am thy wife.". 6. The father and son had a common wife, and one mother has a two-fold character; there is no son who is a good son and who will endeavour to recognise his father.

### **Second Ramaini:**

1. In the light there was sound, which was a woman. 2. And of the woman were Hari, Brahma, and the enemy of the three cities (Siva). 3. Then Brahma created an egg and divided it into fourteen regions. 4-6. Then Hari, Har and Brahma settled in thrcie regions and they arranged the whole Brahmand and the six philosophies and ninety-six heresies. Nobody then taught the Vedas for his sustenance; and Turuk did not come for making circumcision. 7. The woman brought forth from her womb children. They became distinct individuals and followed different courses of action. 8. Therefore, thou and I are of one blood and are one life. Distinctness arises from ignorance. 9. From one woman all sprang, and what knowledge is it brought about distinctness amongst them? 10. (Sakhi) Kabir proclaims: All this ordinary world is distructible; without knowing the name of Ram all individuals are drawned in the ocean of existence.

Kabir's account of creation seems to be this. In the light of Rama there existed a substance which was the subtle element, the sum total of all individual souls. And then that substance was illuminated by that light. Then followed a desire in the shape of a woman, which was at the same time called Gayatri and sound (*Shabda*) and from her creation took rise. His idea thus seems to be that individual souls came into being, or were developed out of substance which was their subtle form, at the will of the Supreme Soul, which (will) was uttered in the form of a sound. That is to say that the Supreme Soul was not the material cause of the world, but a distinct subtle entity. What, in the langauge of the *Upanishads*, became many was this entity and not the Supreme Soul himself. Kabir's philosophy is thus not a monism, but dualism. All individuals sprang into existence

from the same cause, there was one blood and one life; and consequently the distinction of castes and races was later fiction. Kabir thus appears to be an opponent of this distinction.

### Fifth Ramaini:

The substance of the first five *Chapais* seems to be that Hari, Har and Brhma taking the two letters (Rama) laid the foundation of all learning and gradually the *Vedas* and the *Kitabs* (books) came to be composed. 6-7. In all the four ages, the devotees devised systems, but were not aware that the bundle they had tied up was torn. Men ran in all directions for salvation, being afraid. Abandoning their lord, they ran towards hell.

### Eighth Ramaini:

1. The precept "*Tat Twam Asi*" (that thou art) is the message of the *Upanishads*. 2. They lay great stress upon it, and those who are qualified explain it (at great length). 3. Sanak and Narad became happy by regarding the highest principle to be distinct from themselves. 4. The colloquy between Janak and Yajnavalkya comes to the same effect, and that same sweet sentiment was tasted by Dattatraya. 5. Vashistha and Ram sang together the same thing and that same thing was explained to Uddhava. 6. That same thing was substantiated by Janak, and though he had a body, he was called bodiless (*videh*). 7. (*Sakhi*) No mortal becomes immortal without abandoning the pride of birth. That which cannot be seen by experience, is to be considered as 'unseen' or 'unperceived'.

In this *Ramaini*, Kabir shows so much acquaintance with the *Upanishads* and other branches of sacred Hindu literature, that he could not have been a mere 'Sufi' and Mohammedan. He rejects the theory of the identity between the Supreme and the individual souls, which is regarded as being laid down in the expression, "That Thou Art" of the *Chandogyopanishad*. The commentator says that by 'that' is to be understood the subtle body of sixteen parts and the expression means, 'thou art that subtle body'. Kabir takes all the individuals he has named in this *Ramaini* to have preached duality.

In the fourteenth *Ramaini*, there is a condemnation of several systems of religion contained in the *Puranas*, that of Brhma, Hamsa, Gopala, Sambhu, ghosts and goblins and various forms of worship up to the Nevaja of the Mohammedans.

#### **Thirty-fourth Ramaini:**

1. The Pandits are misled by the study of the Vedas which are based on the Gunas or qualities and did not know their own nature and their true friend (God). 2. They practise Samdhya, Tarpana, the six rites and various such other ceremonies. 3. In all the four Yugas, Gayatri has been taught; ask who obtained salvation (*Mukti*) by its means. 4. When you are touched by other people, you bathe; tell me, who is more degraded than yourselves? 5. You are very proud of your virtues. Too much pride is not good. 6. How can he, whose name destroys all pride, bear this proud behaviour? (*Sakhi*) Giving up the traditional mode of worship of the family, they seek the place of Nirvana; having destroyed the seed and the sprout, they became an entity without attributes (*Videha* or *Nirguna*).

Kabir here condemns the rites, ceremonies and other practices of the Brahmins, the pride that is generated in them by these, the contempt in which they hold people of other castes, and also their search of *Nirvana*, or a condition without any attributes, i.e. the Adwaita or a dualistic system which they follow.

#### **Fortieth Ramaini:**

1. The sea, which is a collection of waters, is a ditch and in it are the Sun, the Moon and thirty-three crores of brothers. 2. In the whirlpool (of such a universe) they (men and gods) have seated themselves and desire happiness, but have not shunned the touch of misery. 3. Nobody knows the secret of misery and the world has become mad in a variety of ways. 4. Everybody is a fool or a sage in himself and nobody knows Rama which dwells in the heart. 5. (*Sakhi*) They themselves are Hari (God). When there is no guarantee, the lady (*Mukti* or salvation) goes away disappointed.

Here again there is a condemnation of various systems and of the self-confidence which has given rise to them and the neglect of God dwelling in the heart.

### Sakhis I:

31. The crowds went by the path traversed by the Pandits. Lofty is the ascent to Rama. Kabir has climbed it. 135. The whole world has gone astray by partiality for one's own system. He, who becoming free from partiality, adores Hari, is a wise sage. 138. The great ones are lost in their own greatness, pride peers out through every pore when they are not familiar with a wise preceptor, all the orders of men are of the *Chamar* caste, i.e., the degraded caste of carriers. 182. The Kali is a wicked age; the world is blind and nobody believes in the true word. He, to whom salutary advice is given, becomes an enemy. 211. Three things went to a holy place, (the body, the sickle heart and the mind which is a thief). They did not destroy a single sin, but, on the contrary, the mind contracted ten others. 260. The Kabirs (men in general) polluted the path of *Bhakti*, or faith by washing pebbles and stones. Keeping poison within, they have thrown out the nectar. 358. "I am the author of the whole creation, there is no other superior to me." (This is what some people think). Kabir says that when one does not know what one is oneself, one thinks everything to be contained in oneself. 365. In this world all have passed away considering themselves to be Rama, but no one actually became Rama. Kabir says that those who know Rama, as he truly is, attain all their objects. 366. This world has become mad and has conceived for something which can be no matter of experience, and denying all authoritativeness to actual experience, they attach themselves to a soul without attributes (*Videha*). 372. Seeing a void, men were misled and went about searching in all quarters till they died, but did not find a form without attributes.

### Sakhis II:

91. The bee loiters in the garden, being enticed by innumerable flowers in it. In the same manner individual

soul loiters among the objects of sense and at the end goes away disappointed. 95. The soul is to the mind as monkey is to the showman. Making it dance in a variety of ways, it (mind) finally retains it in its own hands. 96. The mind is fickle, a thief, and a perfect swindler. The gods and the sages fell off in consequence of the mind, and mind finds a hundred thousand openings. 136. If a man gives up his belongings, it does not mean much. Egoism or self-pride cannot be given up. Self-pride, which led astray the great Munis, devours all. Running after gald and women, men are burnt by the passion generated by an illusion. Kabir says, how can they be saved, being like cotton which has come in contact with fire. 147. All became subject to the power of illusion; Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh and the four, Narad, Sarada, Sanak and Ganesh. 209. Do not kill a poor living creature; the life of all is the same. You will not be free from (the sins) killing, even if you hear crores of Puranas.

### Sakhis III:

122. He, to attain whom the great sages (Munis) go through austerities and whose virtues the Vedas sing, himself gives instruction, but no body believes and the single poor soul is bound up by many fetters. If the father (God) will not liberate them, what power has the soul himself to do so? 243. (God) instructs him; but he does not understand and sells himself into the hands of others. I pull himself towards myself; but he runs away towards the city of death (Yama). 282. If you endeavour to acquire one thing (God), every other thing will come to you; but if you endeavour every other thing, that one thing will be lost. If you water the root of the tree, you will obtain a sufficiency of flowers and fruits. 310. If you want me (God), give up your desire for every other thing and become mine, and then every thing will be yours. 336. He has entered into every body and remains there fully watchful. When one wants a certain accomplishment, he inspires him with the corresponding thoughts (calculated to achieve the desired success).

Here the first group contains a condemnation of the current religious doctrines; the second gives a specimen of

Kabir's moral teachings; and the third explains the way in which God's grace operates towards the deliverance of man. Kabir, therefore, was as much a constructive reformer as destructive. In *Sakhi* 260 of the first group, Kabir, it will be seen, condemns the worship of idols. The religion he advocated was, therefore, a pure spiritual theism. The mode of worship used by his followers upto the present day consists of prayers and praises only. Kabir founded a *Pantha*, or a sect, and the *Mathas* or establishments of that sect exist in several parts of India. The principle one is at Benaras with a branch at Maghar in Gorakhpur district, where he died. This last is said to be in the charge of a Mohammedan Mahant, or superior. The second was established by Dharam Dass, his chief disciple, in the Chhattisgarh district. The followers of Kabir's sect are to be found among the lower castes, but the sage is highly venerated by all Vaishnavas of whatever caste or class.

The comments given following the *Ramainis* and *Sakhis* are from the eminent scholar Dr R.G. Bhandarkar and have been reproduced verbatim from his book. One will appreciate that Kabir was really one of the greatest mystic poet-saints of India. His *Ramainis* and *Sakhis* are like aphorisms of ancient Hindu literature. They contain mighty occult truths. This was possible only because Kabir was a truly realised person and imbued with the true spirit of devotion to God. He ruthlessly removed the outer trappings that concealed truth and showed how man had become mistaken in his false notions and concept of God. Love for God should be a unifying factor and not divisive.

There is a beautiful legend connected with his death. Once recognition as a great saint was there, both Hindus and Mohammedans claimed him as a person belonging to their community. Therefore, there arose a dispute about the possession of his dead body. As we know, Muslims bury a dead body in a grave, whereas Hindus cremate it. According to the legend, Kabir appeared to the mourners and asked them to remove the sheet covering the dead body. When the shroud was taken off, to the bewilderment of the people, there were just a heap of flowers in place of the 'dead body'.

The Muslims took half the quantity of flowers and buried them at Maghar, while the Hindus carried the other half to Benaras where cremation took place, "a fitting consummation to a life which had made fragrant the most beautiful doctrines of the two great creeds".

And as Kabir lived, so he died, a saint's death truly. When one thinks of him one foregts the narrow distinctions of caste or creed. In all our hearts, whatever labels of religion we wear, there is an inner conviction that God is one, '*One Without A Second*', and foolish indeed is he who quarrels in petty matters.

## BHAKTA SURDAS - THE BLIND BARD

In a very poor home at Ballabghar (a few miles from Delhi), was born on Vaishakh Panchami in the bright Moon period, in Samvat 1535 (corresponding to year 1479 A.D.), a boy who was blind. The parents found it impossible to support this blind child and so he left the house when only six and settled himself under a tree near a pond. The boy would sit under the tree soliciting alms from the passers-by. Once a rich person was passing by, looking for his lost cow. He enquired from the boy if he had seen the animal. He was sorry when he realised that the person so questioned was blind. Surdas may not have possessed physical sight, but he had an inner vision and could see on the astral plane. He was a clairvoyant and so he told the person about the place where the cow was. This proved correct. The rich man was much impressed. He had a small hut constructed for the boy and equipped it with provisions etc. to support the boy. Reputation of Surdas as an oracle soon spread. People came to the hut to find answers to their problems. He was a true oracle. The visitors were convinced that the boy possessed some extra-normal powers. His wordly wants were, therefore, amply met and he continued to live there in that condition for some twelve years.

This purposeless life ultimately bored him and he left the place when he was eighteen. He trudged slowly till he came to Mathura. Hustle and bustle of the town did not impress him. He proceeded from there towards Agra. Between Mathura and Agra, lies a place called Gaughat. Surdas settled down there in peace. Providence had given to him a rich musical voice. He also had another inborn quality of composing verses. Once again, though he could see nothing with his physical eyes, his inner vision showed to him the child Krishna, playing his divine pranks with his mother Yashoda and other cowherd boys and girls. His compositions thus naturally described what he thus saw.

He used to sing his bhajans composed in 'Braj' bhasa, a dialect of Hindi and sing them before enthralled audiences.

using a 'one-stringed instrument'. Sometimes joined by the audience, it produced a sight fit for gods only. At this time Acharya Ballabhacharya, the famous exponent of Shudh Advaitistic philosophy came to Brindaban, Mathura and Gaughat. Surdas was eager to go to him and pay his obiesance to the famous saint. So he persuaded his companion to take him there. Ballabhacharya came out after his noon-day meals and was greeted by Surdas, who placed his head on his feet. Ballabhacharya was happy to learn that the famous blind bard, who composed such divine bhajans, was in front of him and he asked Surdas to sing.

Ballabhacharya was a close devotee of Krishna and when he heard the bhajans, tears trickled down his cheeks. He embraced Surdas. Ballabhacharya initiated him as his disciple. For some time the blind bard formed part of his retunue. After sometime Surdas came to Goverdhan and settled down there looking after the Srinath temple. He continued to compose songs, all centered round Krishna. It is said that he composed about one lakh and ten thousand songs. Of these, only ten thousand are preserved and are collectively known as 'Sur-Sagar'. Others are extinct now. His verses show his profound knowledge of the spiritual world and his deep devotion to the cow-herd boy Krishna. His description of the sports of child Krishna with cowherdesses as also the sound of his celestial flute are all made alive through his poems. One is almost able to see the whole scenario and the melodies floating before the readers through his songs.

There is evidence to show that Tansen, the famous singer at Akbar's court, used to sing compositions by Surdas. Emperor Akbar was moved by the songs and desired that Surdas be produced before him to sing his bhajans. Surdas however, declined to come. But Akbar was so moved by the bhajans describing the Lord's leelas that he came to hear the bhanajs. Surdas sang his songs with such fervour and zest that at if he was able to see for himself all that he sought to describe through the verses.

Surdas' bhajans have stirred thousands in this country. He is called 'Sun' on the poetic horizon of Hindi literature - 'Sur' is 'Surya' or Sun. In his compositions, there is depth, profundity and stirring music all blended together. Here is an incident that occurred in the palace of the Maharaja of Khairi at Jaipur where Swami Vivekanand was staying prior to his departure for America to attend the World Parliament of Religions. The Maharaja had arranged a musical concert by a celebrated dancer and had requested the Swami to enjoy the evening at the concert. But Swami Vivekanand declined to come, as he thought that it was unfair to listen to the music by a fallen woman. When the danseuse heard of this, she cried with tears of repentence at her lot. She sang the songs composed by Surdas, which were something like this:

"Oh Lord, I pray, won't you forgive my lapses and ferry me across, however, sinful and lowly I be? Isn't your love equally given to all your children? Does the Paras-manि make any distinction, when anything that touches it is transformed into gold? It may be a picce of metal from a shrine-room or a rusted house-hold iron implement from the back-yard. Even the gutter-waters are changed into holy waters when they join the sacred river Ganga. I, Thy own child, beseech Thee, my Lord, to accept me too, without considering my sinful past?"

The song sung in a plaintive voice moved Swami Vivekanand so much that he regretted having caused pain to the dancer. Such were the moving words of the bhajan that Swami Vivekanand felt deeply stirred within.

Surdas's teachings were no different from the ancient teachings. In fact the saints do not say anything new. It is the way they present truth, so that others can see it and feel deeply. Necessary disciplines are required for god-realisation. God cannot be seen by physical eyes. The inner eye has to see and the inner ear has to hear the sounds. It can then only be realised that He is everywhere and every sound is His echo and re-echo. We all make mistakes and commit faults. But the person who repents genuinely obtains the divine

grace. Truth has to be lived constantly and not just for few years or periods. He who deserts till his last days, is like the student who does not study till the examination day when he finds that he is left with no time to study. His failure is imminent. In one of his songs, he says:

"The mind has been allowed to have its way for a long period without any restraint. By constant devotion to the Lord's feet, one can get rid of all evil tendencies. Devotion and absolute faith in the power and glory of God's name are the only means of attaining lasting peace."

In another song he says:

"Sailing on a frigate at mid-sea, the bird attempts many flights outwards, but returns everytime to its perch on the mast, fatigued and exhausted. Even so, man sailing on the ocean of existence seeks joy in the ephemeral objects of the world, but will find real peace only when his being is centered in the constant consciousness of the Supreme Self. After all the toils and turmoils of this fretful world, one has to return to the blessed Feet of the Lord to find eternal peace."

Such is the soul-stirring message of the singing bard. He has immortalised himself in the hearts of everyone, who has read his songs and poems, so much so that 'Sur Das' is an appellation applied to all who are blind and have been denied physical sight, but have been elevated to a position of love and respect by being called 'Sur Das', whose life story has been described above.

## SANT GOSWAMI TULSI DAS

In the district of Banda (Uttar Pradesh), there is a village called Rajapur. There lived Shri Atmaram Dubc, who was a Saryupari Brahmin. His wife's name was Hulsi. In Samvat 1554, on the seventh day of bright Moon (corresponding to 1532 A.D.) was born Tulsidas, who was named Rambola. It is said that the baby did not cry after birth as is usual and instead uttered the Lord's name 'Ram', much to the astonishment of his parents and relatives. Legend says that all his thirty two teeth were intact at birth. This was considered inauspicious and the frightened mother sent the baby to be tended by her maid-servant, as the birth was considered of ill-omen. The very next day the mother died of grief. The maid-servant was called 'Chhuniya' and she brought up the child as her own. When Rambola was only five, the god-mother also died leaving the boy a complete orphan.

Shri Narharyanand, who was a disciple of Shri Anantanand, a famous devotee of Lord Ram, took notice of this boy and took him to Ayodhya. Rambola's thread ceremony was performed by his guru in about Samvat 1561 (1539 A.D.). The boy took lessons in all the Hindu religious scriptures like Veda Shastras etc. After sometime, both Shri Narhari and Rambola came to Soron, where the guru narrated to his disciple the epic story of Lord Ram. From there, Tulsidas came to Kashi and remained there for some fifteen years and studied all the Vedic scriptures and Valmiki Ramayan. He then returned to his original place and began to give discourses on the life and teachings of Lord Ram.

In Samvat 1583, in the bright Moon period thirteenth day in the month of Jyeshtha (corresponding to year 1561 A.D.) he was married to Ratna Devi, a beautiful girl. The couple led a happy married life. Tulsidas was passionately in love with his wife. As the story runs, once when the wife went to her parents' house, Tulsidas, braving the hazards of a dangerous journey and crossing the river in spate, went to

meet his wife at night, much to her consternation who scolded him for his passion and infatuation. It is said that she told her husband that if the passion he had for the body of his wife, which consisted only of bones, flesh and fat, could be turned towards the feet of the Lord, life would be entirely different. This opened the eyes of Tulsidas and he left his wife in search of spiritual happiness. He came to Prayag, discarded the dress of a householder and became an ascetic. He visited all the holy places and then finally came to Kashi where he began discourses on Lord Ram. He had begun writing of the immortal epic poem '*Ram Charit Manas*' or simply '*Ramayana*' in the year 1574 and completed the work at Varanasi. Besides *Ramayana*, he wrote eleven other books, some of which are:

1. '*Kavitawali*' - This deals with Lord Rama and in the end is a chapter dealing with the Lord's supreme devotee Hanuman.
2. '*Dohawali*' - It deals with a variety of subjects like ethics, devotion, chanting of the Lord's name and knowledge.
3. '*Gitawali*' - Poems on the sports of Lord Rama as a child.
4. '*Krishna Gitawali*' - Stories of Bhagwan in poetical lyrics, relating to Lord Krishna as a child.
5. '*Parvati Mangal*' - Describes the marriage of Parvati and Lord Shiva.
6. '*Janki Mangal*' - Describes the wedding of Lord Rama and Sita.

### **Tulsi Das' Philosophy:**

Tulsidas was not an ardent social reformer like Kabir, but he believed in the unity of all religions, though there was a special niche for Lord Rama. In this way he can be said to propound the theory of monism of the Advaita school of philosophy. To have written '*Ram Charit Manas*', which consists of seven *Kandas* or chapters and runs into thousands of poems, was an unprecedented achievement. It

took two years, seven months and 26 days to complete. No other work has made such a deep impression on Hindu mind as this work. It is like a Bible for Hindus. It abounds in poetical beauty. It is no doubt an inspired work written in Awadhi dialect of Hindi language. Many Hindus have readings of this book, either without a break called '*Akhand Ramayan*' or in parts or only '*Sunderkand*', which deals with the assault on Lanka and the crossing of sea by Hanuman. The book was not liked by a section of Brahmins at Kashi, who considered it a sacrilege to write Lord's life in Hindi instead of Sanskrit, which was considered the language of Gods. Many stories have grown up showing how this work was blessed by Gods and was divine. Once the manuscript was in the Vishwanth temple along with other holy books, and was placed at the bottom. The temple was closed and to the surprise of all, it was found that the next morning it had occupied a place on the top of other books. In another case, burglars were engaged to steal the manuscript from the house, but they failed in their attempt as they found two archers guarding the house where the manuscript was lying.

Tulsidas was a true humanitarian and had absolute faith in the Lord. The popularity of the work can easily be understood by the fact that Geeta Press of Gorakhpur has by now printed over a million copies. It has come out in various forms, i.e., with bold letters, in medium and small letters as well as various sizes. It is doubtful if there is any other work which has made deeper influence on the Hindu mind other than this work. Its metre is '*Chauपि*' and '*Chhand*' and many a devotee will be found who can recite the whole of *Ramayan* or at least quote one *chauपि* for any and every occasion. It is said, "A good soul is like the '*Manas*' (lake) and in it is the pure water of the sweet glory of Ram. The story of Ram when reflected in these waters washes off all sins. One must therefore, read '*Ram Charit*' or the story and deeds of Lord Rama." Tulsī regarded Ram as *Para Brahma* and Seeta as *Parashakti*. He said:

"One should have undiminishing devotion to Ram, abandoning all other thoughts, just as when you are

going on to write the 9th table, the digits of all products add up to nine only and not less. In whatever state a person may be, devotion to Ram should remain constant."

Tulsidas spent the remaining days of his life on Assighat in Kashi. He died on Saturday, Shravan Krishna Tritiya, Samvat 1680 corresponding to the month of July in 1624 A.D.

*Samvat solah so assi assi gang ke teer,  
Sravan Sukla sapthmi Tulsi tajyo shareer.*

Tulsidas has been one of brightest Saint-poets of India and will continue to inspire millions of Hindus.

## MAHATMA TAILANG SWAMI

Tailang Swami was a saint who lived to an incredible age of 280 years. Whereas the longevity was itself a miracle, the saint possessed many occult powers and left a deep impression on all who came in touch with him. He is more widely known in Bengal, not so much that the scene of his activity, as for his first authentic biography written by Shri Uma Charan Mukhopadhyaya, who became his ardent devotee towards the end of his life. The original biography was written in Bengali and only later on translated in Hindi by Dr Vasudev Chatterji, a homeopathic practitioner. It made a deep impression on the Bengali readers and many were drawn to him.

In the South, in a place called 'Vijana' in the town of Holia, lived a prosperous landlord, named Nrishinghdhar. He had two wives. From the elder, was born a son named Tailangdhar, on an auspicious day, i.e. Poush Shukla paksha in Rohini Nakshatra, in the Bengali era 1014 corresponding to year 1608 of the Christian era. From the infancy, one found that the child was a precocious one and was quiet and intelligent. He had a phenomenal memory and whatever was heard once, was learnt immediately. He often retired to a solitary and secluded place and became lost in meditation. Observing these traits, the father became apprehensive of his son's future. Tailangdhar's mother, Vidyawati was a very pious lady and possessed great qualities of head and heart. She understood the mental workings of her son and counselled her husband to leave him alone.

The father wanted to get his son drawn to the affairs of the world and so wanted to marry him off. Tailangdhar stoutly refused any such idea. Vidyawati, the mother, was a great devotee of Lord Shiva and while she was lost in meditation, her countenance beamed with a radiant glow causing awe and respect in the minds of those who beheld her. She said to her husband not to worry because Tailangdhar was not willing to marry. If he felt that the family name

should continue, he should marry off the other son, Shridhar (born from the second wife). Nrishingdhar was agreeable to this proposal and Shridhar was married. This made both Vidyawati and Tailangdhar extremely happy. Tailangdhar was at this time undergoing great mental upheavals which did not escape the attention of his mother. She began to discourse to him on spiritual matters. Tailangdhar felt greatly illumined by these talks. His spiritual development continued.

Nrishingdhar at this time fell ill and shortly afterwards died. This happened in 1648 A.D. when Tailangdhar was just forty. It cast a gloom over the whole family and Vidyawati performed severe austerities and devoted herself to the Lord's worship. But the loss of her husband was too severe for Vidyawati. She lost her health and in 1660 A.D., she breathed her last.

Tailangdhar became a complete recluse after this and lost all interest in the world around him. He started visiting the cremation grounds more frequently and subsequently made the place his permanent dwelling place. His brother, Shridhar, tried to persuade him to return home and take over the management of the vast property, but Tailangdhar did not agree. He asked his brother to go back and assume all responsibilities and look after the household. Shridhar reluctantly obeyed his brother's command as there was no other choice. A dwelling place was constructed by him for his brother's residence. Tailangdhar remained there for some twenty years i.e. upto 1680 A.D. Soon the premises took the shape of an ashram and many began to visit him.

At this time (1680 A.D.), a renowned yogi, Bhagirath Swami, who came from Vastur, a village in Patiala, happened to visit the ashram and stayed there for some time with Tailangdhar. Bhagirath Swami took Tailangdhar along with him to Pushkar Lake near Ajmer and spent some time there. Tailangdhar was initiated by Bhagirath Swami in 1686 A.D., thereafter he was known by the monastic name Ganpati Swami. Bhagirath Swami died at Pushkar in 1696 A.D. and Ganpati Swami (Tailangdhar) left Pushkar for visiting other

holy places of the country. He reached Rameshwaram. A huge Mela is held at Rameshwaram in the month of Kartik, Panchami Shukla paksha. Ganpati Swami joined the fair. Many ascetics and holy men were camping there. Ganpati Swami took part in the spiritual discussions and discourses. He met many persons of his native place and they tried in vain to persuade him to return to his village.

An incident took place at this time that is worth recording. A Brahmin, who had come to visit the mela, suddenly took ill, collapsed and died. His companions raised a big hue and cry, which caused a great commotion in the fair. While they were preparing for his funeral rites, Ganpati Swami arrived at the scene and when he saw the situation, he took some water from his water-bowl and sprinkled it over the dead body. Gradually consciousness returned and the dead man got up. Ganpati Swami asked hot milk to be served and then went away. They all realised the greatness of the saint and the miraculous powers possessed by him.

Soon afterwards, in 1700 A.D., Ganpati Swami left the place and visited Dwarka and some other places. A Brahmin, who had witnessed the miracle at Rameshwaram, devoted himself to Swamiji's care. On being asked what he wanted, he mentioned that he was a poor man and wanted wealth and a son to carry on the family's name. Swami blessed him. The Brahmin got both the boons. He became prosperous and was also blessed with a son.

In 1702 A.D., Ganpati Swami left Dwarka and came to Nepal. He selected a secluded spot and practised severe austerities. His fame spread very soon and people eager to meet him began to arrive. Once the King of Nepal had gone out hunting accompanied by a big entourage. During the hunt, they chased a lion who ran hither and thither seeking protection from his chasers. The Army General had fired a shot at the lion which missed the target and the lion ran seeking protection. It came where Ganpati Swami was sitting lost in meditation. The lion crawled in front of him, as if begging to be saved from his captors. Swami opened his eyes and patted the animal. When the king and others

arrived, they were surprised to witness this scene. Ganpati Swami said, "Do not fear or hate animals. If you have love for them they will never harm you. See this lion has received from me nothing but love and as such he is behaving like a tamed pet. Shed all fear and come near with love and the animal will not harm you." The King of Nepal was very impressed and came again with many royal presents. Ganpati Swami looked affectionately at the king, but declined to accept any presents. He gave spiritual discourses for the benefit of the King. But this incident created disturbance for the Swami as he was not allowed any peace or solitude. He therefore, left Nepal in 1702 A.D. In 1711 A.D. he went to Mansarovar, the famous lake resort and spent much time in meditation and practice of Yoga exercises.

At Mansarovar a widow was carrying her only son aged seven for cremation. She was wailing and crying, because the boy was her only hope. The boy had died of snake bite. His father had died when he was a child and the mother had pinned all hopes and aspirations on him. When Ganpati Swami appeared on the scene, the mother for a moment forgot her grief and felt that he was a god-man and probably he could do something for the dead son. She prostrated before the saint and wept bitterly holding his feet tightly. Ganpati Swami was moved at this sight. He touched the body of the son and recalled him to life. Great was the jubilation all round and shouts hailing the majesty and greatness of the saint rent the air. Swami left Mansarovar soon afterwards and took his abode in the Markandeya Ashram on the banks of Narmada sometime in 1727 A.D. There lived another saint Khaki Baba. One day, he saw that the waters of Narmada were like foaming streams of milk and Ganpati Swami was drinking it by cupping his palms. Khaki Baba followed the example, but to his surprise found that it was just plain water. Khaki Baba was stunned and on return to his ashram he narrated the miracle to the other inmates. Their veneration for Ganpati Swami increased.

Ganpati Swami left Markandeya Ashram in 1734 A.D. and came to Prayag (Allahabad). Selecting a secluded spot he settled down and was lost in meditation. In front of him

flowed the river. Swamiji sat there motionless and did not move even when it started raining heavily. Ram Taran Bhattacharya recognised Swamiji and enquired why he was sitting in the rain. The Swami said that the boat in the midst of the river was soon going to capsize and the passengers therein had to be rescued. And so it happened. One mighty gust of wind swayed the boat to and fro and then turned, throwing away all passengers. Swamiji vanished from sight and Bhattacharya saw to his utter surprise the boat coming to the shore, as if being towed by an invisible force. The passengers were safe in the boat; while Swamiji was in the midst of them. Ram Taran Bhattacharya after witnessing this miracle fell at the Swami's feet and cried bitterly. The Swami said, "My son! there is nothing to feel surprised. We as children of God have all His qualities in a microcosmic form and if we can develop these powers, there is nothing that is not possible for us."

In 1738, Swamiji went to Kashi (Varanasi) and stayed in what was known as Tulsi Das' Bagicha (garden). Once he cured a person named Brahma Singh, who was resident of Ajmer, suffering from leprosy and deafness, by merely touching him. The man got up and was lost in singing praises of Swamiji. Swamiji moved from Tulsi Das' Bagicha and shifted to Vcd Vyas' Ashram. Here also Swami affected many wonderful cures. After sometime, Swamiji again shifted and stayed at Hanuman Ghat. One incident is worthy of mention. In the Vishwanath temple, a Maharashtrian lady was in the habit of visiting the temple with prayers for granting her the fulfilment of some desires. Noticing the naked Swami, she spoke about him in some disparaging terms and returned home. At night the Lord Himself appeared to her in her dream and blamed her for speaking disrespectfully about the Swami and said her desires could only be fulfilled by the Swami's grace. The lady realised her mistake and as soon as it was daybreak, she came to Hanuman Ghat and lay prostrate at Swami's feet and craved his pardon. She informed him that her husband was suffering from a tumour inside his abdomen. Swami gave her some holy ash and asked her to apply it to the abdomen of her husband. The ash cured her husband miraculously.

Soon afterwards, the Swami left Hanuman Ghat and came to Dashashwamedh Ghat. While he lived there, Shiva Prasad Mishra's son had been suffering from paralysis for a long time. He was not responding to any treatment. Swami blessed the son and asked his father to return home. Gradually the boy recovered and was restored to normal health. Swamiji's name became a household word in Kashi and people of all castes began to come for his *darshan*. From that moment onward, citizens of Benaras believing the Swamiji to hail from Tailangana, began to reverentially address him as Tailang Swami, by which name he came to be subsequently known.

Many are the miracles that were witnessed while Tailang Swami lived in Kashi. A rich person presented two gold bangles. The Swami wore them to make the donor happy. A greedy person saw the gold bangles and once gave a strong liquor to Swamiji in place of water, in the hope that once Swamiji became intoxicated and lost consciousness, he would remove the bangles. Swami understood the wicked person's game, but showed no anger and taking off the bangles gave it to the person. Tailang Swami always remained nude. On receiving a complaint, the Police Chief summoned him and asked him to wear a Dhoti. When his orders were not obeyed, he was shut up in a cell and locked. To the utter surprise of everyone, they noticed the Swami taking his morning walk on the roof of the cell even when the lock was intact. Such wonderous occurrences took place again and again till all were reconciled to his peculiar manner of living and thought it best to leave him alone.

In 1789, a Hindu Raja of an independent kingdom visited Kashi. His queens observed complete purdah and no man was permitted to see them. A passage leading from the Raja's palace to the river Ganges was therefore, partitioned with 'Kanat' on both the sides. The Ranis then came for the desired bath, accompanied by women attendants. There was no other person in sight at the bathing ghats. They were however, extremely surprised to see a naked person soon afterwards and fled to the palace. The Raja was furious at this incident. He sent his soldiers to go and bring the villain

to his presence. The Swami was repeatedly questioned, but he gave no answer. Some persons revealed his identity, but this made no change in the Raja's behaviour and he sent away Tailang Swami threatening him with dire consequences if he ventured again to come nude. Swami went away without saying a word. At night the Raja had horrible dreams when a hermit with matted hair appeared and warned the Raja of serious consequences for insulting a God-man. The Raja woke up with a start. His condition became critical and alarming. When the Raja regained consciousness, he sent his servants to go and search for the Swami. He then went to him personally and fell prostrate at his feet and craved his pardon. Tailang Swami was too magnanimous and instantly pardoned the Raja.

In 1801, Tailang Swami shifted to Panch Ganga Ghat and lived near the Bindu Madhav temple. He rarely spoke to anyone. His devotees began to call him 'Mouni Baba' or the Swami who maintained silence. He, however, conversed with a few chosen devotees, when absolutely necessary. Adjoining the place where Tailang Swami lived, Mangal Dass Thakur and his younger brother Krishna Prasad Thakur lived with their mother Amba Devi. They all became his attendants. Tailang Swami had kept a cow, which was looked after by Krishna Prasad. Tailang Swami conversed with Mangal Dass by signs which only the latter could correctly interpret. On a 'bedi' or raised platform, Tailang Swami slept or rested and on the wall behind, three Sanskrit Shlokas were written in Devnagri script. Whenever, some querist put a question, Swamiji pointed his finger to one of the three shlokas. Swamiji had thirty books or so all handwritten. Sometimes he would send for one and have the necessary portions read out.

In the year 1811 the King of Ujjain once visited Kashi. He stayed in the palace of the Raja of Kashi in Ramnagar. Once he took a boat ride and came towards Manikarnika Ghat. There he saw Tailang Swami lost in meditation and sitting on the river-waters. On a request by the King, Tailang Swami came and stood in the boat. The King showed him a sword presented to him by the East India Company in recognition

of his bravery. Tailang Swami held the sword in his hands and after examining it for some time, threw it in the Ganges, much to the consternation of the King. The King flew into a rage and spoke insulting words to Swamiji. The boat had in the meantime come to the shore. Tailang Swami wanted to come down, but the King prevented him from doing so and decided to punish him. Tailang Swami understood his intentions and putting his hands in the current brought out two identical swords and told the King to pick up the one that belonged to him. The King could not identify the sword that was his and this caused the Swami to retort, "If you cannot identify your own property, what is the justification for you to get so excited and angry. You are a fool and an arrogant person." So saying, the Swami handed over one sword to the King and threw the other in the river. The King realised his mistake, fell at the saint's feet and craved his pardon which was given. The Saint then jumped into the river and disappeared from sight.

In 1870 Dayanand Saraswati, founder of the Arya Samaj, came to Kashi. As was his habit he came down severely on Hindu Gods and Goddesses. He was an accomplished speaker and cast a spell on his audience. When this news was brought to the notice of Tailang Swami by Mangal Dass, the Swami wrote something on a piece of paper and asked Mangal Dass to deliver it to Dayanand Saraswati. Dayanand Ji read that paper and soon left Kashi. The contents of the chit of paper have remained a mystery to this day.

Numerous miracles and cures were brought about by Tailang Swami. Eminent persons like High Court Judges came to meet him. Their arrogance soon gave way to utter devotion and blinkers were removed from their eyes; once they had met Tailang Swami. During this period Umacharan Mukhopadhyay became one of his most ardent devotees. He was working at Munger and often came to Kashi to spend his maximum time with him. He has narrated his various experiences in the book that he wrote about Tailang Swami, in Bengali. During a long period of his association, he witnessed many miracles and received initiation from Tailang Swami.

When Tailang Swami knew that the time to abandon the mortal coil had come, he told his devotees about this some three to four months before his end came. He also asked Uma Charan to come to Kashi. Tailang Swami had explained to Uma Charan many spiritual mistakes which the latter had taken down. The end came in 1888. On the day itself, Tailang Swami desired that his body be placed in a wooden box (coffin) and the cover screwed up. It should then be dropped in the mid stream in the Ganges. His wishes were carried out by his devotees. Tailang Swami was then 280 years of age and yet looked fresh and healthy.

A Tailang Swami 'Math' exists today at 23/15 Panch Ganga Ghat, Varanasi where the Swamiji's statue has been installed. Many devotees visited the shrine and have varying experiences.

Tailang Swami had met Lahiri Mahashaya and had spoken lovingly about him. Swami Yoganand in his '*Autobiography of a Yogi*' has written about Tailang Swami in extremely respectful terms. Tailang Swami was indeed a Maha Yogi.

## MAHARSHI DAYANAND SARASWATI

Dayanand was born in Gujarat. His original name was Mool Shankar. He was born in 1824 in Norvi in Kathiawar state, in a highly respected Brahmin family. His father was an official in the tiny state. The family was rigidly orthodox, with a strong domineering character. At the age of six, Mool Shankar was invested with the sacred thread and all the sacred obligations consequent on this ceremony were strictly enforced on the young lad. When he was fourteen, his father took him to a temple to join in the celebration of Lord Shiva's festival, the Maha Shiva Ratri. The boy had to remain on a strict fast and spend the night in strict vigil and prayer. He showed commendable grit in observing the austerities and kept awake when all others went to sleep. Suddenly he saw a small mouse eating the offerings, made for the Lord and then climbing the body of the idol. The boy's heart revolted at this sight. He left the temple and his home altogether. He refused to participate in any of the religious rituals. It marked the beginning of serious differences between the father and son, as both possessed an indomitable and unbending will. Dayanand at the age of nineteen fled from his home to escape a forced marriage. He was caught and imprisoned. He fled again and this time (1845) for ever. He never saw his father again.

For the next fifteen years Mool Shankar, the son of a rich Brahmin, subsisted on alms only. He wandered as a Sadhu clad in saffron clothes trudging the roads of this vast country. Like Vivekanand, he also went in search of Sadhus, ascetics and learned men. But he was also studying the Vedas and training himself in the practice of Yoga. He suffered, he braved fatigue and was the victim of insults and humiliations at the hands of orthodox Pandits. But he never wavered. During his journeys, he had long discourses, which he did in Sanskrit only with the so-called learned Pandits. But he was far from satisfied. He found that the people of this country were steeped in superstition and dogmas and were, to his way of thinking, highly irreligious.

In about 1860, he met at Mathura an old Sanyasin, Swami Virjanand Saraswati, a person more implacable than Mool Shankar himself in his condemnation of all weaknesses, a Sanyasin blind from infancy and quite alone from the age of eleven. He was a very strict disciplinarian, learned, but terrible man. Dayanand placed himself under his discipline and served him as his pupil for two and half years. When they took leave of each other, Swami Virjanand took a promise from the young man that he would dedicate his life to the service of his countrymen, destroy their heresies and re-establish the ancient religious methods.

Dayanand commenced preaching in the northern parts of the country. His methods were unorthodox. He thundered against all forces of thinking that collided with his own. He was immensely successful in his campaign and during the next five years, he made deep inroads into the bigotry of the masses and powerfully assailed conversion of Hindus into Islamic faith. During the next five years attempts were made to kill him on four to five occasions. Once a fanatic threw at him a living cobra in the name of Shiva, but Dayanand caught it and crushed it with his powerful hands. It was impossible to get the better of him, because of his masterly knowledge of the Vedas which he placed in an intrepid manner. In November 1889, he visited Benaras, the home-town of learning as well as orthodoxy. He was engaged in a Herculean contest with the Pandits for hours after hours till he brought down his assailants to their knees, one person against about three hundred Pandits.

Dayanand claimed that Vedant as practised, was contrary to the true Vedas. He claimed that he was going to revive the true Word, the pure Law. He was hooted and excommunicated. But this could not extinguish the fire he had lit, nor dim the light that it shed. He met Ramkrishna, when he stayed in Calcutta from December 15, 1872 to April 1873. He was also cordially received by the eminent Bengali social and religious reformer, Keshab Chander Sen. But Dayanand was not a person to make any compromise with persons imbued with western culture. He swore by the Indian national theism derived from the Vedas.

From Calcutta, he went to Bombay, where shortly afterwards the organisation that he had founded, began to grow roots. On April 10, 1875, the Arya Samaj, or the Association of the Aryas of India was founded at Bombay. The principles and the objectives of the new society were formally presented at the session in Lahore in 1877. Dayanand spread a close net-work over the whole of northern India. The only province that remained unaffected was Madras. He was killed by an assassin by poisoning him at the hands of a concubine of a Maharaja as he had denounced her. He died at Ajmer on October 30, 1883.

His work however, continued and the number of his followers increased year after year. The number runs into millions today from about 40,000 in 1891. The thunderous champion of the Vedas had almost declared a war on Christian theology and their methods of proselytisation. Dayanand had no great regard for Koran or Puranas. He trampled under his foot Brahmin orthodoxy. His monumental work is '*Satyarth Prakash*' or the 'Light of Truth'. He modified the system of observing the Shodash Sanskars.

Dayanand Saraswati (a suffix he took from his teacher and mentor) was also associated with the Theosophical Society which also championed the cause of the Vedas and Hindu religion. The Society was formed in 1875 by Madam Blavatsky and Cononel Olcott. Dayanand transmitted to the languid body of India his formidable energy. His words had the effect of a heroic power. His creation, the Arya Samaj, postulates equal justice for all men and all nations, along with equality of sexes. He repudiated the caste system and only recognised professions or guilds suitable to the genius of the people. He recognised that equal opportunity should be available to all persons for raising their intellectual horizons to the desired heights. The eighth principle of the Samaj is 'to diffuse knowledge and dissipate ignorance'. In Punjab and Uttar Pradesh a number of educational institutions have been founded to further the principles and cause of the Society.

## SWAMI SHIVANAND SARASWATI

Sri Appaya Dikshitar is a well-known name in South India. He had authored more than 104 books on a variety of subjects, all in Sanskrit. His intellectual eminence in Vedantic philosophy was well recognised and has inspired many. He expounded with great skill the four tenets of philosophy viz. Adwait, Dwait, Vishishtadwait and Shudh Adwait. His famous work 'Chaturmata Sangrah' consists of 'Nyaya Muktavali', 'Nyaya Mayukr-Malika', 'Nyaya Manimala' and 'Nyaya Manjari'. His wife's name was Achcha. Ten miles away from Tinnevali Junction is a beautiful canal from River Tamraparni. It girdles Pattamadal like a garland. Tamraparni is held in great esteem like Ganga in the North and is aptly called 'Ganga of the South'. It passes through rocky beds rich in copper and is as such called 'Tambra', meaning copper.

Sri P.S. Vengu was a descendent of Dikshitar and was a Tehsildar of the Ettapuram Estate. He was pure and virtuous and a Siva devotee. The Raja Saheb of Ettapuram and other citizens held him in high esteem. His wife, Parvati Ammal was also a virtuous lady. Their third son Kuppuswamy was born on Thursday, 8th September, 1887 when Bharani Nakshatra was rising in the horizon. Kuppuswamy is our main character, later known by his monastic name Swami Shivanand. His two elder brothers, P.V. Veeraraghava and P.V. Shivaraman Iyer were all well placed in life, later on. The child Kuppuswamy helped his parents during the Pujah of Lord Shiva and thus the seeds of devotion were planted within him. He had a very good physique and a broad chest and was well admired by all for his muscular body. He was bold and courageous by nature. The boy thus grew in very healthy environment, spiritually cradled by the bountiful nature. In the school, he always fared well and won many prizes. Later on he joined the S.P.G. College at Trichnepalli, after passing Matriculation examination from Raja's High School in Ettapuram in 1903.

He actively participated in the college extra-curricular activities. In the college drama, 'Mid-Summer Night's Dream'

he appeared as Helena and acted in a very coyish manner. After passing the Madura Tamil Sangam examination, he opted for the medical line and ran a medical journal, 'Ambrosia' for three years. While studying medicine at the Tanjore Medical Institute, he worked very hard and developed great skill in surgery. His leisure hours were spent in reading all kinds of books on medicine. After leaving Trichnapalli, Kuppuswamy went to Madras and joined Dr Haller's pharmacy. Here he had to dispense medicines and maintain accounts of sales etc. Having heard about great opportunities for his profession, Kuppuswamy left Madras for Malaya by S.S.Tora. His mother tied for him plenty of sweets and other eatables.

After disembarking, Kuppuswamy went straight to the residence of Dr Iyengar, who gave him a letter of introduction to one of his old friends, Dr Harold Parsons, a medical practitioner in Seramban, the capital of Negri Sembilan. From Seramban, Kuppuswamy went to see A.G. Robins, Manager of a nearby rubber estate which had its own hospital. He was appointed and worked there with great zeal and dedication. He worked there for nearly seven years after which he joined the Johore Medical Office Ltd. on the recommendation of Dr Parsons. He worked in his new job with unmitigated zeal and soon endeared himself to the workers of the estate due to his sympathetic and helpful behaviour. Soon he became a friend of the management and the workers, who held him in high esteem. During his stay in Malaya, Dr Kuppuswamy contributed many valuable articles to the medical journal, 'Malaya Tribune'. During his stay, he specialised in the treatment of tropical diseases. He stayed there for three years performing yeomen service to his fellow persons. He became a member of the Royal Institute of Public Health (M.R.I.P.H.), London, a member of the Royal Asiatic Society (M.R.A.S.), London and an Associate of the Royal Sanitary Institute, London. He also published some books such as 'Household Remedies', 'Fruit and Health' and some others. Dr Kuppuswamy was fond of Bhajans and Keertans and performed them during his stay in Malaya. He continued the practice of Laya Yoga and Swar Sadhana.

In 1923, Dr Kuppuswamy renounced the easy-going life of Singapore and came to Benaras. He visited the Kashi Vishwanath temple. From there he went to Nasik and Poona. He covered the distance from Poona to Pandharpur, about seventy miles on foot. He also visited the Ashram of Yogiraj Narayan Maharaj at Kedgaon. Thereafter he spent nearly four months in Dhalaj on the banks of river Chandrabhaga. During his various peregrinations, he learnt to understand the various types of people and learnt their ways. He understood that pilgrimage to holy places was really a part of his Sadhana. Dr Kuppuswamy felt the need of a Guru, and in his search, went to Rishikesh.

The Himalayan scenery and the natural beauty captivated his heart and he realised that his search was over. He found Rishikesh an ideal place for his spiritual Sadhana. He took ardently to the service of the poor and sick and regarded this as part of his Sadhana. He started a small dispensary and named it Satyasevashram, where pilgrims on return from Badri Nath and Kedar Nath needed medical attention. At Rishikesh, he practised Asanas (body postures) and Pranayam (breath control). For further practice, he moved to the Swarga Ashram and continued to practise austerities on a bigger scale. He loved seclusion and would spend hours sitting on the banks of the Ganges and gazing at the sky and the nature around him. He had a small cottage built for his use and surrounded it with a barbed wirefencing to prevent intruders. He would meet visitors, but at fixed hours only and would gladly share with them his numerous experiences. To other aspirants he would write letters and send them valuable guidance. He made no show of his erudition and never adopted a 'holier-than-thou' attitude, but gave the impression of one who was keen to help in whatever manner possible for him.

In 1925, he visited Sherkot Estate, Dhampur in district Bijnor. The Rani of Sherkot, Shrimati Phulkumari extended a hearty welcome. He organised Bhajan parties and rendered medical help to the villagers and the needy. From Sherkot, Swami Ji returned to Rishikesh on foot, meeting villagers on the way and giving discourses on Yoga. He held Bhajan and

**Keertan sessions.** During his numerous tours, Swami Ji also visited Rameswaram in the extreme South and stayed in the Raman Ashram. He was accompanied by Chand Narain Harkull, an Advocate of Sitapur. He visited Jagannath Puri and also various other places in Bihar. He drew huge crowds wherever he gave talks and held Bhajan and Keertan sessions. There was hardly any place of importance in any state like Punjab, Kashmir, Gujarat or in the South, which Swami Ji did not visit. He also visited Ganga Sagar near Calcutta.

On his return to Rishikesh, he was eager to visit Mt. Kailash in Tibet. On June 12, 1931, he left on a pilgrimage to that holy place in the company of Swami Adwaitanand Ji, Sri Brahmachari Yoganand Ji and Maharani Suratkumari Devi of Singhahi Estate. They had a bath in the Mansarovar Lake and then went round the holy mountain Kailash. Swami Ji did all the journey on foot. He was greatly impressed by the exotic beauty of nature. He was convinced that no other place in the world could match in beauty and majesty what he saw there. The high mountains, snow-peaked, reflected in the limpid waters of the lake, had a spiritual effect. The party returned to Almora on 22nd August, a distance of 230 miles which was covered in two months.

Swami Ji again left on an extensive tour of the whole country as well as Sri Lanka on 9th September 1950, spreading spiritual knowledge. He remained on tour for two months and returned to Rishikesh on 7th November. During his tour, he had come in contact with thousands of truth-seekers and aspirants. Swami Ji mixed with them freely removing their mental cob-webs. He used to carry out a very busy schedule drawn up by the organisers, but never felt tired as he would always recoup energy, through meditation and other Yogic exercises, like deep breathing, Bhastrika Pranayam and Kirtan. They energised and galvanised him for more arduous work. He also used to conduct Prabhat Pheris and Kirtan at many places.

To give an impetus to spiritual activities, Swami Ji founded the Divine Life Society on 14th January, 1936.

Anyone who believed in Truth, Non-violence and Purity of Mind could become a member of the Society. He was assisted in the work of the Society by some other disciples who had taken to monastic life. The aim of the Society was to spread the message of universal brotherhood based on the essential unity of all religions. It zealously spread the philosophy of Adwait. So far many branches of this Society have been established in various parts of the country. The Society sends out teams of volunteers at times of some calamities to render help to the afflicted. Swami Ji also started publication of a magazine, 'Divine Life' to spread the message of the Society. The first issue came out in September 1938. In 1941, a Prayer Hall was constructed and also a Yoga-Hall. A Shivanand Primary School was opened in 1942. Swami Ji had a temple built in Rishikesh in 1943, dedicated to the worship of Lord Vishwanath.

In 1946, he established the World Sadhu Sangh, with the object of providing an opportunity to all the Sadhus and Saints to assemble at one place and exchange ideas on spiritual matters.

Swami Ji was indeed a great spiritual leader and saint. He has written numerous books. He has laid down seven 'Scientific Samskars' for the guidance of the aspirants:

- (i) 'Swasthya-Samskaar' (about perfect health)  
One must take a small quantity of ordinary food without any use of spices, sour or chilly material. Tea, coffee, smoking, drinking of liquor or other intoxicants should be completely given up. For fifteen or twenty minutes Yogic and other physical exercises must be done without fail. One should develop regular walking habits or playing games like hocky and football.
- (ii) 'Shakti-Samskaar' (Development of Power and Energy)  
One must observe complete silence for at least two hours every day and eight hours on Sundays. One must have sex-act not more than once in a month, and the period of abstinence should be gradually increased.

(iii) '*Aachar Samskaar*' (Behavioural Improvement)

One must speak truth and nothing else but the truth. Speak less. Do not hurt any one by your language or even thoughts. Be simple, straight forward and dependable. Control your anger.

(iv) '*Ichcha Samskaar*' (Control of desires)

Try to remain without taking any sugar for weeks together. Do not take salt on Sundays. Give up spending time in clubs or hotels.

(v) '*Hriday Samskaar*' (Purity of Heart)

Perform selfless service for some days in a week. Every month, set aside a part of your income to be disbursed amongst the poor. Read the religious books.

(vi) '*Atma Samskaar*' (Purity of the Soul)

Study the 'Geeta'. Read atleast ten to twenty Shlokas and ponder over their meaning. Attend Kirtans and other religious festivals.

(vii) '*Adhyatmic Samskaar*' (Spiritual Development)

Go to bed early at night. Get up in the morning at 4 o'clock. Take morning bath and other necessary practices. Do breathing exercises from five to six and spend time in meditation and worship of the Lord. Do some form of Sadhana every day and recite *Gayatri Mantra*.

These practices may seem too orthodox or even impossible, but judgement about their effectiveness should be reserved till they have been actually carried out. Only then one can find for himself the results. Of course they are meant for those who are aspirants and are looking for a expanded spiritual life.

Swamiji has written numerous books and also his Autobiography. Its fifth edition has come out in 1989 and has been published by the Divine Life Society. He has described his life and experiences in a candid manner. Short paragraphs are there for guidance of aspirants.

This is how he has described his experience:

1. I have seen God in my own Self.
2. I have negated name and form, and what remains is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, Absolute and nothing else.
3. I behold God everywhere. There is no veil.
4. I am one. There is no duality.
5. I rest in my own self. My bliss is beyond description.
6. The world of dream has gone. I alone exist.

And this is his message to humanity:

"Delight in Good.

Make up your mind to tread the spiritual path.

Be patient.

Go slowly. Go ahead.

Be deliberate.

Ascet.

Recognise.

Realise: I am the immortal soul.

This is the discipline.

This is Siva's message."

Towards the end of his life Swamiji's health began to deteriorate. He left behind his mortal coil suddenly on 14th July 1963. Though he is physically no more, he has left behind him a rich legacy in the form of his books and the Divine Life Society.

## SHRI SHYAMA CHARAN LAHIRI MAHASHAYA

Shyama Charan Lahiri, popularly called Lahiri Mahashaya, was born on September 30, 1828, in a village in Ghurni, in Nadiad district (near Krishnanagar) in Bengal. His parents were Gaur Mohan Lahiri and Muktagashi. They were a pious Brahmin couple and devotees of Lord Shiva. Shyama Charan spent his early years at Ghurni in his ancestral home. Even when he was just three or four, he was observed sitting in a Yogic posture, immersed in sand. In the winter of 1833, the property of the family was completely destroyed as the nearby Jalagi river changed its course and joined the Ganges submerging all the land around. The icon of Lord Shiva, which was installed in the Shiva temple by the Lahiris, was however, saved from being washed away. It is at present installed in the Shiva Mandir at Ghurni. After this disaster, the whole family shifted to Benaras and settled there. The father, Gaur Mohan Lahiri had a Shiva Mandir constructed where worship and other austerities were carried out regularly.

Shyama Charan took his early lesson in Hindi and Urdu in various study groups in Benaras. He joined a school run by Narayan Ghoshal and learnt Sanskrit, Bengali, French and English. He was greatly drawn towards discussions by the local Pandits on spiritual matters, Vedic texts and other religious sculptures. He listened carefully to Vedic discussions by a learned Maharashtrian extremely well-behaved towards his elders and his play-mates.

He had a healthy and well-built body. At the age of eighteen he was married to Kashimuni, daughter of Shri Debnarayan Sanyal. They were a devoted couple and had four children, two boys and two girls. When 23, Shyama Charan joined the Military Engineering Department as an Accountant. He worked with great devotion and received many promotions during his service. During the course of his service, he was transferred to many places, like Ghazipur, Mirzapur, Nainital, Benaras and Ranikhet. On the death of

his father, he assumed full responsibility of the household and looked after it well. In Garudeshwar Mohalla in Benaras, he purchased a house where the whole family lived.

At the age of thirty-three, a change took place when he met his Guru and Master, Shri Babaji. The purpose of his life was then explained to him and the latent powers, mystic and occult, which he had possessed in his previous life were restored. Lahiri Mahashaya's Guru 'Babaji' was an ageless person and has been hailed as a 'Maha-avatar'. Lahiri Mahashaya had a reunion with his Master sometime in 1861. This is how it happened. Lahiri Mahashaya was posted as an Accountant at Danapur in the Military Engineering Department of the Government. One morning the Office Superintendent informed him that he had been transferred to Ranikhet and he must proceed at once to join his new posting. Accordingly, Lahiri Mahashaya left Danapur. It took him thirty days to reach Ranikhet, as travel during those days was no easy task.

His office duties were light and he spent many hours in roaming about amidst the Himalayan hills and forests. He was specially interested in exploring the region, as he had heard that many highly evolved saints and sages lived in the caves, lost in meditation. During one such wandering, he was surprised to hear someone calling him. Lahiri Mahashaya continued the upward climb of the Dronagiri Mountain. Finally, he reached a small clearing where there were many caves. On the top of one such cave, stood a young man, who bore a striking resemblance to his own looks except for his copper-coloured hair. The young man said, "Lahiri, you have come. Rest for a while in this cave and then we will talk. It was I, who called you." Lahiri was surprised. The man had extremely majestic looks and power seemed to flow out from every pore of his body.

Shyama Charan Lahiri obeyed the command and on entering the cave noticed many blankets neatly folded as also a few water-bowls. "Do you remember this place?" asked the saint; but Lahiri could not remember having ever come to there. The saint now spoke in perfect English and

said that it was he who had arranged to bring Lahiri to Ranikhet and the telegram summoning him had been sent at his desire. Lahiri was in a state of complete bewilderment. The saint then touched and struck him on his forehead. An electric current seemed to have struck him and Lahiri recalled all his past and burst out, "Yes, my Master. I now recognise you. You are Baba Ji my great Guru. I have always been devoted and attached to you. This place of hallowed memory was my habitation in my previous life." Lahiri prostrated himself before the Master, who raised him saying, "I have waited for you for the last three decades. I have preserved your things, because I knew that on the expiration of your Karma, you would come back when summoned. Now take over."

Under his Master's direction, Lahiri Mahashaya drank the oil in the bowl and then stretched himself on the banks of the river. The icy winds blowing all round and the whipping cool waters had no effect on him, as if unseen and unknown powers had been given to him by the oil. Soon afterwards, he saw a beautiful Gold Palace standing nearby. He was taken there and then initiated into Kriya Yoga by his Guru. Lahiri remained there for some days and learnt the technique of Nirvikalpa Samadhi from his Guru. Lahiri was absent for nearly ten days and had been given up as lost and perished in the Himalayan snows. In his absence a telegram had been received cancelling his posting to Ranikhet and recalling him to Danapur. Lahiri Mahashaya met his Master on a few more occasions. His colleagues at Danapur saw an immense change in his bearing and looks.

The English Office Superintendent, who fondly called him 'Ecstatic Babu', one day bemoaned about his ailing wife in England when for a long time no news had been received from her. Lahiri Mahashaya promised to bring news about her and retired to an adjoining room and sat in meditation. After some time he came out and informed the Office Superintendent that his wife was improving and was writing a letter to him. He even mentioned a few sentences of that letter. "Ecstatic Babu, though I know that you are no ordinary person, but this is too much", said the British. But

his surprise was great when a few days afterwards, the promised letter arrived and contained some of the sentences mentioned by Lahiri Mahashaya. When after some months, the wife came to India to join her husband, she at once recognised Lahiri Mahashaya as the man who had visited her in England and helped her to get rid of the illness.

Lahiri Mahashaya initiated some disciples in the technique of Kriya Yoga. He had love and affection for all and enjoined on everyone to follow the tenets of their own faith. He gave new hopes and courage to the down-trodden and told them that they belonged to the same God who was the Father of all. There was no distinction of caste, colour or creed in the eyes of the Creator and these distinctions were man-made. They should adopt the training of Kriya Yoga, which would free them from the shackles of the body and enable them to be one with the Immanent spirit. A Muslim should recite his Namaz five times daily as laid down in the Koran and the Hindu should spend some time in deep meditation as laid by the Scriptures. The Christian should visit the Church regularly and pray to God and read the Bible and follow the teachings. The disciples should avoid theoretical discussion of the scriptures, because their true import could only be grasped when the teachings are lived and not merely talked about. Lahiri Mahashaya was a great exponent of 'Bhagwat Geeta' and often recited passages from the book to illustrate a particular point.

Lahiri Mahashaya possessed many mystic and occult powers. He has been credited with bringing back to life persons declared dead and suffering from numerous incurable diseases. Kashi Muni, his wife has personally testified to his many miraculous powers, such as levitating in space and materialising his body at more than one place. Many saints of repute received the initiation in Kriya Yoga. Mention may be made of Swami Bhaskaranand of Benaras and Balanand Brahmachari, the Deogher ascetic. Lahiri Mahashaya retired from Government service in 1886, nearly twenty-five years after his Ranikhet initiation. "To the awe of all beholders, Lahiri Mahashaya's habitual physiological state exhibited the superhuman scatures of breathlessness, cessation of

pulse, sleeplessness, heart-beats, calm eyes unblinking for hours and a profound aura of peace." Thus writes Swami Yoganand, about the Master Panchanan Bhattacharya who was his personal disciple attached to the Master's service. Like many other prophets, Lahiri Mahashaya himself wrote no books, but his discourses to his disciples contained interpretation and explanations of many knotty subjects of scriptures. As mentioned earlier, there was a special place in his discourses for 'Bhagwat Geeta'. Talking about miracles, Lahiri Mahashaya said, "The operation of miracles should not be publicly discussed. They are merely the operation of subtle laws of nature."

Lahiri Mahashaya was a highly evolved person. Many illustrious saints of his time had the privilege of being initiated in Kriya Yoga. Tailanga Swami, who was a saint of renowned repute, mentioned about him in very endearing terms.

Lahiri Mahashaya laid down his body on September 26, 1895. In another few days there would have been his sixty-seventh birthday. His end was as spectacular as his life. He had indicated to his disciples when his end was to come. He had developed a carbuncle in his back. To his alarmed disciples, he said that the body had to develop some visible cause for end. His last words were, "Be comforted, I shall rise again. I am going home and will now spend my time with my Guru, Babaji in the Himalayas and in the cosmos." After these words, Lahiri Mahashaya rose from his seat, turned his body in three circles and then with his eyes set towards the North, he dissolved his spirit in the Eternal. His body was cremated with all householder rites on the banks of Dashaswamedh Ghat. His disciples had, however, the privilege of seeing him on many occasions in his resurrected body at many places.

\*Note: The article on the life of Shyama Charan Lahiri Mahashaya is based on the description given by Swami Yoganand in his inimitable book 'Autobiography of a Yogi', published by Jaico Publishing House, 125, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Bombay. It was first published in 1945, exactly fifty years after Lahiri Mahashaya's death, as predicted by him.

## SWAMI RAMTIRTH

One of the brightest luminaries of the twentieth century in this country was Swami Ram Tirth. Like Swami Vivekanand, he achieved in a life span of thirty-three years what many had failed to accomplish. Before the monastic name 'Ram Tirth', he was called Tirth Ram. His father Hiranand was fond of narrating stories from Hindu epics, 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata', which made a deep impression on the mind of the child. His mother died three days after his birth. He was born on 22nd October, 1873 at Murariwala in Punjab. His grand-father, Pandit Ramachandra was a famous astrologer. When he cast the horoscope of the boy, he predicted that the boy would either die at a very young age or otherwise, would grow into a famous saint and religious guide. The child was brought up by his father's sister, Dharmakaur. Tirth Ram had a brother and a sister older to him. His aunt could not live with her brother for a long time looking after the children as she had to join her husband. Hiranand, therefore, married again. His second wife belonged to Gujranwala town. Tirth Ram had to be brought up by his step-mother, who had a stern disposition and did not treat the child very kindly.

Tirth Ram had his early education in the local school at Murariwala. The school Maulvi, Muhammad Ali was very fond of the boy, because of his good manners and brilliance in studies. The School course, which comprised of five years study, was completed by the young lad in three years only. When Hiranand sent two rupees as a token of his regard for Muhammad Ali, the latter refused the gift and instead demanded a cow. This was arranged with great difficulty.

When Tirth Ram was just two years old, he was betrothed according to the prevalent custom, and was married at the age of ten. After finishing school education, Tirth Ram was admitted to a college in Gujranwala at a distance of about six miles. Hiranand arranged for his lodging with his wife's parents who lived there. It was at this place that the young

boy came in contact with his preceptor, Dhannamal, who was a very devout and wise person. It is said that he sometimes remained in a state of Samadhi for as long as four hours and developed strange mystical powers. Dhannamal became extremely fond of Tirth Ram, as if he was aware of the important role that the boy was destined to play in his later life. Tirth Ram regarded him as his Master and served him well in all possible manners. As he did extremely well in the college examinations, he was given a scholarship, which became very useful to the needy boy. In the High School examination he again did very well, standing forty-eighth in the whole of Punjab. Hiranand wanted the boy to give up studies and assist him in running the house, as he felt that he could no more afford the expenses required for the boy's further studies. But Tirth Ram would not have it and decided to pursue studies on his own, without any assistance from his father. When Tirth Ram got himself enrolled in the college, Hiranand out of anger sent his daughter-in-law to live with Tirth Ram. He had now to look after his wife as well. But after some time, Hiranand cooled down and recalled his daughter-in-law. Tirth Ram passed Intermediate Examination from the Christian College at Lahore and secured the highest marks. He was then enrolled for the B.A. examination and managed his affairs with the scholarship that he got, but only after managing his affairs in a frugal manner, to the extent of starving at times. He had to face enormous difficulties, but passed the B.A. examination with distinction and merit.

His father had cut off all financial help. As such Tirth Ram could never have continued his studies, if these persons, viz., Dhannamal, his preceptor, his maternal uncle and a sweet-meat shop owner, Jhandumal had not helped him. Tirth Ram passed the B.A. examination with similar distinction. In the question paper of Mathematics, he solved ten questions even when the examiners had to answer only nine questions. He wrote at the end of the answer book, a request to the examiner to check any nine questions. He secured high marks in Mathematics, as well as English. He passed the M.A. examination, both in Urdu and Persian even though he had Sanskrit as subject for his B.A. Tirth

Ram passed the M.A. examination with the same distinction, as he had secured in the previous examinations.

During his student days, he fondly studied many ancient books on philosophy, such as 'Yoga Vashishta' and 'Upanishads'. He started looking for a job and after great efforts he was appointed as second teacher for Mathematics in the Mission High School at Sialkot. While working as a teacher, Tirth Ram also associated with the local Sanatan Dharma Sabha. He led an extremely austere life, taking long walks and then regulating his food habits. Sometime he lived only on milk and some inexpensive fruits.

When he found a job at Lahore, he called his wife to live with him, so as not to burden his father. His salary was just enough to manage household affairs, though he sent some money regularly to his father also. Even though his wife lived with him, he never became a devoted house-holder in the true sense and always maintained a life of renunciation and aloofness. He was keen to be formally initiated as a Sanyasi and take to monastic life.

Tirth Ram developed a keen devotion towards Lord Krishna and often became lost in deep meditation about the form of the Lord so dear to him. He was soaked so much with devotion that even when he beheld a cloud in the sky he was reminded of Krishna who had a similar complexion and wept in the ecstasy of joy. He was now keen to visit the places of the Lord's sport, viz. Mathura and Vrindavan. He took leave from the College and left for these places accompanied by Pandit Deen Dayal. Tirth Ram found great peace and tranquility after visiting these two places and became aware of swift changes within himself on his return to Lahore. He began to give lectures and discourses to vast audiences and the number of listeners rapidly increased. In the Government College, itself Tirth Ram delivered a lecture on 'Bhakti-Yoga'. The audience including the Principal were spell-bound and the Principal suggested that the same be published in a book-form. In Amritsar also, his ideas expressed through his lectures echoed and he was invited to deliver talks. Narain Das, belonging to the local Arya Samaj, was so moved

that he became a follower of Tirth Ram and served him like a true disciple.

Swami Madho Tirth, Shankaracharya of Dwarka Peeth happened to visit Lahore. As a Secretary of the local Sanatan Dharma Sabha Tirth Ram organised a royal welcome for him and arranged his lectures and talks at a number of places. Shankaracharya saw the burning flame within Tirth Ram and during his sojourn explained the true significance of the dictum 'Aham Brahmasmi' i.e. I am Brahma, a key-word for all Adwaitis. Tirth Ram found a new meaning in his life and felt a strong desire to leave behind everything and go to Uttarakhand in the Himalayas. His father, Hiranand, never liked this idea, because he was going to lose the support that his son gave him. But Tirth Ram wrote very conciliatory letters to his father and Dhannamal, who also felt equally piqued for similar reasons.

In 1897 Swami Vivekanand had returned to India after spending four years abroad and he established Ramakrishna Mission in India. Swami Vivekanand fell indisposed and went to Kashmir for recuperating his health. He then came to Rawalpindi. The Sanatan Dharma Sabha at Lahore extended to him an invitation to visit Lahore. Tirth Ram took upon himself the work of organising his talks and other arrangements connected with the welcome to the town. Swami Vivekanand delivered three lectures on Vedantic philosophy. The entire population of Lahore felt almost hypnotised after listening to these lectures. Tirth Ram could not remain unaffected as he had already a substratum within him. He had a long talk with Swami Vivekanand when the latter came to his place in response to a dinner invitation. Swami Vivekanand impressed on him the need to devote his life to the propagation of Vedantic philosophy. Tirth Ram decided to follow in his footsteps. At this time he was teaching in Christian College, Lahore. Often in his lectures he would bring to bear philosophic thoughts. This alarmed the Christian administrators of the college. Tirth Ram resigned from this job in 1899. He sent his wife away to her parents' house where she delivered her second son, Brahmanand. Tirth Ram left Lahore to go to Amarnath, the

famous shrine. After a visit to the place, Tirth Ram returned to Lahore. He founded an Urdu paper 'Alif, but it did not continue for long. In 1900 during the summer Tirth Ram left Lahore and went to Uttarakhand. His old students and alumni and other residents gave him a tearful farewell. Speaking to the tearful crowd at the station, he said, "You are all images of Krishna. Why this sorrow at separation? I am always with you." Tirth Ram had begun to refer to himself in the third person and called his own self 'Ram Badshah' or King Ram.

Tirth Ram reached Haridwar accompanied by Narayan. He then proceeded towards Gangotri. Under his instructions, Narayan threw all the money he had in the Ganges, as Tirth Ram felt that God alone was his succour. Along with Tirth Ram were his wife and two sons, Madan Mohan and Brahmanand. The group arrived at Gangotri almost penniless. Baba Ram Nath at this time arrived at his Kali Kamali Kshetra. Learning that Tirth Ram ji with his entourage was camping nearby, he instructed the local grocer to send to the group grains worth Rupees ten every month without fail.

Tirth Ram found the place suitable for deep meditation. After sometime, he sent his wife and son Brahmanand away and remained with Narayan and son Madan Mohan. He was thereafter initiated into monastic life by Swami Ramashram. He then assumed the monastic name *Ram Tirth*. Tirth Ram spent all his time with his Guru Swami Ramashram and observed all the required austereities laid down by the order. After some days, he sent away Narayan also and preferred to remain alone. His son Madan Mohan was admitted to a school in Tehri. He desired complete seclusion. He retired to a lonely cave about five miles away and spent his time in deep meditation. He went to still higher peaks of Himalayas accompanied by Narayan and Tularam (he was in future called Swami Ramanand). Swami Ram Tirth visited Gangotri, Yamunotri, Badrinath and Kedarnath and all other surrounding places of holy renown. Swami Ram Tirth has preserved his experiences of these holy places in the numerous memoirs he has written.

While living on mountain tops, Swami Ram Tirth took a very modest and small quantity of food. This affected his digestive system, but Swami Ji did not care much on this account. After sometime he sent away Narayan and Tularam and left on a journey to Sumeru mountains in the company of five young mountain-lads. There were biting cold and freezing winds, but Swami Ram Tirth continued his journey ahead and even his young companions were left behind. He reached the top of Sumeru Mountains, called the Golden Peaks. Not a soul was in sight, man or animal. Swami Ji enjoyed this seclusion. On the return journey he visited Badrinath. Winter was fast approaching and Swami Ram Tirth decided to go to Mathura to attend a religious conference. The Secretary of the Conference, Shivaganacharya requested Swamiji to preside over the deliberations, to which Swamiji agreed. The news was hailed by all in the town, because Swamiji's name and fame had spread far and wide. On arrival at Mathura, Swamiji received a royal welcome. His discourses drew huge crowds and he poured nectar to the listening audiences through his talks on spiritual subjects. From Mathura, Swamiji went to Tehri state. He spent his time in solitude lost in deep meditation. The ruler of the state happened to pass and saw the Swami whose countenance beamed with great spiritual radiance. The ruler approached him and was greatly impressed by his learning and wisdom. At his request, Swamiji went to his palace to spend sometime there.

In 1893, Swami Vivekanand attended the World Conference of Religions as India's representative. He made great impression and his speech was widely acclaimed. There was a proposal to hold a similar conference in Japan at Tokyo in 1903. On learning about this conference, the ruler of Tehri suggested that Swami Ram Tirth should attend this conference. Swami Ram Tirth agreed to the proposal and the ruler made arrangements to send Swami Ram Tirth and his disciple Narayan to Japan. Reservations for the journey by ship were made. The ship was to sail from Calcutta. Swami Ram Tirth and Narayan reached there, but were late, and according to information, the dates for the

conference had passed. Swamiji had therefore, to stay in Calcutta for some time. The two boarded a ship for Tokyo on 28th August 1910. Swamiji disembarked at Hongkong on the way. The local Hindus and Sikhs welcomed him warmly. On a request from the Sikhs, he delivered a discourse in the local Gurudwara. After a week's halt, the two sailed for Tokyo. After a day's halt at Yokohama they reached Tokyo. From the port they drove straight to the premises of Indo-Japan Club. Pooran Singh, a devout person, was in-charge of the club. He welcomed Swami Ji whole-heartedly. He was comfortably lodged in the club. Pooran Singh was so much impressed by Swami's presence and personality that he became his disciple and later on became a hermit himself. He has written a biography of Swami Ji which has been widely acclaimed. He wrote, "There is peculiar spiritual radiance in Swami Ji's countenance and a peculiar brilliance in his eyes. Whenever he looks at a person, he is immediately attracted to him like a magnet attracting iron. There is a peculiar resonance in his voice. His words are sweet like nectar."

At Tokyo it was learnt that there was no such World Conference on Religions. The truth was that a person had played this ploy and floated a rumour for his own benefit. Swami Ram Tirth greatly enjoyed this comedy of errors and considered this as an opportunity brought about by the Lord to bring him to Japan. Swami Ji remained in Tokyo for about three weeks during which time he delivered three lectures. The audience was thrilled to hear him, because Swami Ji had made a beautiful synthesis of Vedantism and Buddhism. The Russian Ambassador, who had attended one such lecture, was so moved that he came to meet him, but Swami Ji had already left Tokyo by then. Swami Ram Tirth decided to visit America and therefore, he sent away Narayan to Wardha in India to spread the message of Truth and Knowledge. An Indian circus, owned by one Mr Kshaye, was giving shows in Tokyo. The owner had engaged a whole ship to take his group to America. He invited Swami Ji to accompany the party. While on the ship, Swami Ji found a number of young Japanese students, who were doing odd

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jobs to pay for their fare. On being asked, they replied that though they came from affluent families, they did not believe in spending the nation's money for their personal expenses and would earn their wages to support themselves. Swamiji felt that a nation which had such young patriotic men was bound to prosper and reach the top of the world.

When the ship docked at the port of San Francisco, everyone disembarked, but Swamiji was quite unconcerned and continued to stroll on the deck. When another American passenger enquired from him about this luggage, he replied, "Why, my luggage which consists of a mere hand-bag is here with me." "Where is your money?" was another question. "I have no money and I do not need any." The American was truly amazed and further enquired, "Where are you going to live and who are your friends?" "Oh yes," the Swami replied, "I have a very close friend, and that is you". Swami Ram Tirth placed his hand on the shoulder of the person who felt enthralled at his mere touch. Swamiji went with his new friend, who was his host for the next two years. His name was Dr Albert Hiller. Swamiji, when not otherwise occupied, spent all his time in practising austerities and in deep meditation. His food was extremely simple and he did most of his personal work. His ochre clothes, radiant countenance beaming with a spiritual glow soon attracted the Americans wherever he went. They were drawn to him and heard his discourses as if an angel of God was speaking to them. When the number of visitors increased, he appointed Mrs Pauline Whitman as his Secretary, who had great reverence for Swami Ji and served him with great devotion.

In the beginning visitors came from a modest strata of society, but gradually men and women from affluent class also started meeting him and narrated their personal problems. Once an American lady, who possessed enormous wealth, came to him and placed all her wealth at his feet to be utilised as he wished. Swamiji comforted her and said that peace, harmony or bliss was not a commodity that could be purchased. "You should consider that the entire world and humanity is yours and their suffering is common with yours. Once you develop this attitude, you will get what you

desire." Swamiji gave her a new name 'Ganga' and blessed her to be pure and virtuous like the fabled Ganga of India. On another occasion, an American lady, heavily laden with costly jewellery and rich robes, came to him, took off all her jewels and ornaments and placed them at his feet and cried bitterly on the death of her son saying, "I am told that you possess miraculous powers. Bring back my son." Swamiji said, "Yes, I can do so. But you will have to pay a heavy price for it." "I am willing to do anything or pay anything if you can do so", said the lady. "That is not enough. You will have to do something more", Swamiji continued. "Agreed. I will give anything and every thing. Name it please", said the lady. Swamiji pointed out to a dark Negro child standing nearby and asked the lady to adopt him. "This is very difficult, Swamiji". "And so is your question", replied Swamiji. The American lady was very impressed and took the child home and brought him up as her own son. On another occasion, another American lady came to meet him when he was lost in 'Samadhi'. His eyes were closed and there was a radiant spiritual halo round his face. After waiting for some time, the lady was about to leave when Swamiji came out of his 'samadhi', which ended with a loud chanting of the word 'AUM'. The sound reverberated all round. The lady felt as if something had exploded within her. She fell at his feet. Later on she came to India with Swamiji and visited various places where Swamiji had dwelt. While in America, Swamiji had a tent pitched on the banks of a river and spent most of his time there lost in deep meditation. Many persons would come to him and offered him valuable presents in cash and kind. Swamiji declined them all as he had no desire for the same.

Returning from America, Swamiji landed in Bombay on 8th December 1904. On his way, he stopped in Egypt for some time, where he made a deep impression on the people by his profound learning and sublime thoughts. Swamiji stayed in Bombay for five days. Later on, his friend and admirer Shivaganacharya persuaded him to visit Nasik and Hoshangabad and then go to Mathura. At Mathura, he stayed in the Ashram of Shivaganacharya. He was the same person, who a few years earlier had requested Swamiji to

preside at a religious conference at Mathura. At Mathura, Swamiji narrated his experiences of America and its people.

His old devotee, Pooran Singh who had hosted him in Tokyo, was at Lahore. When he heard that Swamiji was in Mathura, he came down to meet him. Swamiji looked very distressed at the thralldom and the chains that bound his country. He said to Pooran Singh that if occasion required, he would be the first person to offer his head for the country and should be followed by Pooran Singh. Even the British Government was upset by the ideas propagated by Swamiji. Once when he was sitting alone in his room, dressed in his usual ochre clothes, two suspicious looking persons entered his room, looking at him. They realised that they were in the presence of a spiritually elevated person. They fell at his feet. Actually they belonged to the Intelligence Department of the Government and had come to investigate Swamiji's activities. They retreated after paying their respects to him.

Swami Ram Tirth left Marhura and after visiting Alwar and some other places, finally came to Ajmer and camped near the famous Pushkar lake. He found great peace and lived there in the palace of Kishengarh. He remained there for about three to four months and continued his spiritual activities which included sermons to his countrymen to rise above narrow sectarianism and discard the foreign yoke which was strangulating them. From Ajmer Swamiji went to Darjeeling. He remained alone enjoying the ecstatic beauty of the Himalayas and the nature. During this period he wrote many important books. On his return, he visited places in Bengal and Bihar and then came to Lucknow. He led a very busy life and taught Vedantic philosophy to students. He found that his health was weak and so he left Lucknow. From Lucknow he came to Haridwar. He would not take any medicines and believed in nature cure. From Haridwar, Swamiji went to live on the slopes of Chandi Devi mountain ranges. Accompanied by his disciple Narayan, he went to Rishikesh. Vyas Ashram is situated about fifty kilometres from Rishikesh. Swamiji went to this place to continue his Sadhana uninterrupted. In order to reach this place, there was a hanging bridge of ropes and one had to

travel seated in a huge basket which was then pulled to reach the other side. It was therefore, natural that not many would come to this place. Swamiji as such had an ideal place to remain lost in deep meditation.

Swamiji decided to improve his knowledge of Sanskrit. He devoted himself assiduously to the study of this language. He possessed great brilliance and soon became proficient in this field also. With the acquisition of this knowledge, he began to read the Shastras and Upanishads in their original texts. His understanding as a result improved immensely. Mention has already been made of Mrs. Wellman, the American lady. She came to India and met Swamiji in the Vyas Ashram. Swamiji practised silence. His knowledge had reached the level of intuitive stage and he therefore, decided to leave Vyas Ashram. He went to Vashistha Ashram in the month of February 1906. This Ashram is situated at a height of thirteen thousand feet. Swamiji lived in a secluded cave nearby and took only fruits and other natural hilly products like bulbous roots etc. His health declined. Narayan, his constant companion, persuaded him to go to Tehri for proper medical treatment. At Tehri, the ruler extended a hearty welcome and requested him to stay in the palace, but Swamiji had a small cottage built for him, whereas Narayan was assigned to live in another adjoining cottage.

It was seventeenth of October 1906, and the day was Somwati Amawasya near Diwali festival. While asking Narayan to go to his own cottage, Swamiji began to lecture to him about the impermanence and perishability of human body. Narayan should always follow the path of righteousness whether or not Swamiji's body remained with or without life. Duty must never be discarded. Narayan was extremely surprised on this unexpected homily and wondered about its occasion. In the morning Swamiji came out of his cottage, did his morning exercise and then entered the holy waters of the Ganges, ostensibly to take bath. But he never came out and his cook Bhola Dutt in vain waited for him to come out. On entering the waters, Swamiji had adopted a sitting posture and only when life was extint the corpse came up

floating. The ruler of Tehri, on hearing this news had the corpse taken out. It was given a respectful funeral.

Thus ended the life of one of the greatest sons of India. He shone across the spiritual skies of this country with unmatched brilliance. He has left behind him a great spiritual legacy. A proper assessment of his achievements and personality has still to be made. Like Sant Dhyaneswar, Adi Shankaracharya and Swami Vivekanand, in his short span of thirty-three years, his contributions to the spiritual wealth of this country were immense.

### **Swami Ram Tirth's Philosophy:**

Swami Ram Tirth was a keen exponent of Vedantic philosophy. Not only did he preach Vedantism, he lived it also. He had blended in his life 'Gyan' or knowledge and 'Bhakti' or devotion. He had issued six 'Hukumnamas' or edicts for the guidance of the world:

- Edict I** All differences arise out of borrowed Dharma and not from real Dharma. Real Dharma consisted in practice of cardinal virtues, such as speaking truth, helping others, being kind and merciful.
- Edict II** This was strict adherence in the performance and discharge of one's duties and obligations.
- Edict III** This was about observance of moderation in sexual life and temperance in all other matters.
- Edict IV** This was about non-observance of religious practices in a narrow and restrictive manner.
- Edict V** One must enjoy bliss, which is resident in everyone, without seeking it externally.
- Edict VI** It pertains to being large-hearted, thereby developing tolerance.

During a lecture delivered in Tokyo before the College of Commerce, Swamiji dwelt on the practice of cardinal virtues like Truth and Honesty, which alone could bring about permanent prosperity. One must bring about in his attitude catholicity in place of sectarianism, altruism instead of selfishness. In another lecture delivered in the Golden Gate Hall at San Francisco on 26th January 1903, he stressed

forcefully the need to recognise His immanence in all beings and to give up narrow parochial thoughts of colour and race. "A rose is a rose, is a rose by whatever name it is called." It is the indwelling spirit in everything that has to be seen and recognised and not the outward form. He quoted metaphors and parables from the eastern scriptures and the Bible to illustrate his point of view. Truth is the same everywhere, universal and not fragmented. He emphasized the same philosophical thoughts when lecturing to his own countrymen. Philosophy of Adwait must be understood and practised. He is one without a second. Every particle reflects His glory. The same cosmic energy pulsates in all beings. The form is perishable, but not the spirit resident therein. Swamiji quoted profusely from the scriptural texts specially 'Geeta' and showed that Lord Krishna had preached Karma Yoga, or the Philosophy of Action for every householder, so that all conflicts within and without were resolved, and attachment for the fruits of action laid aside. The real purpose of all such philosophy is to discover the identity of the self with the universal Self, so that all ideals of 'I' and 'YOU' are dissolved and one discovers the cosmic identity.

Such was the philosophy of the Master. As has been stated earlier, a proper assessment of his personality and work is still incomplete. As time passes, his teachings will be better understood. Along with Swami Vivekanand, he stands out as a beacon of light for the guidance of humanity.

## GURU NANAK DEO

Nanak Dco, the founder of Sikh religion, was born on 3rd November, 1469 in a small cottage at Talwandi. This place was later called Nankana Sahib and is situated in Pakistan, in Shekhpura district, about 30 miles from Lahore. His father, Mehta Kaluchand and mother, Tripta Devi belonged to the Bedi sect of Kshatriya community. The time of birth was 1.20 a.m. when the moon was shining and the face of the child was shining as the moon above. Other auspicious signs were also seen at the time of birth. Pandit Hardayal, a Brahmin priest, officiated at the naming ceremony and the name 'Nanak' was given. The Pandit stated that the child was a divine incarnation and would do immense service to his countrymen and humanity in general.

Nanak even as a child was of a highly contemplative nature and was always sober. He would remain absorbed and would meditate on the transitory nature of the world around him, trying to get to the truth behind all that was manifested. He was fond of feeding the poor and sometimes gave away to the poor even the clothes he wore. He could not see suffering of any kind and did everything in his power to alleviate the pain and distress wherever he found them. Nanak's father was worried about the strange behaviour of his son and took him to a doctor, so that if it was some kind of disease, he could be given the required treatment. Nanak however, told the doctor that he had no bodily suffering and sickness of spirit assailed him for which the doctor could do nothing. He was drawn towards thoughts of God and wanted to solve the riddle of human distress.

Nanak was placed under Baijanth, a learned man for receiving education. Nanak was not very interested in this form of formal education and astounded his teacher by reciting many Shlokas from the holy books. The teacher soon realised that the boy was a highly evolved soul and had taken birth to teach others and not to be taught himself. Nanak was later sent to a Muslim teacher, Maulvi Syed

Hussain for learning Persian language and the philosophy of Islam, as contained in the Koran. But here again the formal and academic type of education did not interest Nanak and he then began to spend his time in the company of Sadhus and ascetics. He diligently joined their discourses on spiritual matters and enjoyed listening to them.

When he was nine, the thread ceremony was performed according to tradition. All preparations for the ceremony were made and relatives and friends turned up in large numbers to join the rejoicings, but young Nanak at the time of ceremony, refused to wear the sacred thread. He asked the Pandit, that the thread was soiled and he would not wear it. "What do you mean by this, and what kind of thread will you wear?" And Nanak uttered those famous words, "If compassion be the cotton and contentment be the thread, and continence the knot and truth the twist, that would weave an ideal thread for the soul. The thread will neither break nor burn or be soiled and wasted. He who wears such a thread round his neck is the one blessed by God."

Nanak's father was greatly disappointed at his son's outbursts and was grieved to see that Nanak was taking no interest in worldly matters. The father tried all the methods to distract him and make him more 'wordly'. He was asked to herd the cattle and perform other jobs, so that he could be absorbed in such activities, but Nanak did not change. The herd of cattle was let loose and allowed to graze and wander away wherever they liked. The animals naturally strayed away and damaged standing crops of other farmers, thus creating troubles and other problems. The father then tried to draw Nanak into business and gave him twenty rupees to start as a modest capital. Accompanied by his servant, Nanak set out to make purchases. On the way he found some poor people and distributed the money amongst them for buying food. He returned home empty-handed and was severely reprimanded by his father for this waste. Nanak coolly replied, "Father I have invested the money in good business. The seeds that I have sown will produce a very good harvest, which shall be reaped in the other world. God who is watching everything will give us good returns." The

place where Nanak distributed the bounty has now become a holy place and is called 'Saccha Sauda'.

Nanak's father thought that if Nanak was married, he might then become wordly. Nanak was married to Sulakhni, daughter of Mulchand of Batala in Gurdaspur district. Nanak was just fourteen then. Later two sons were born, Sri Chand and Laxmichand. But even amidst family surroundings, Nanak's mind could not be weaned away from God and he remained more and more distant from his family. Nanak's father was greatly disappointed and then thought of sending Nanak away, so that amidst new surroundings he might change. His son-in-law, Jai Ram was holding an important position under Daulat Khan Lodhi, the Subedar of Sultanpur. Nanak was employed as a Keeper of the Government godown. Nanak here also started distributing grains and cereals to the needy and poor, though otherwise he was extremely honest and upright.

While at Sultanpur, Nanak always went to the nearby river Beas and after his morning bath would sit in meditation for long hours. The bathing ghat is now known as *Sant Ghat* and the tree where he sat for meditation is called '*Baba ki Beri*'. It is said that once he sat for three days in meditation and it was during this period that he realised the truth and got enlightenment. He understood that the time had come for him to start his mission of reforming the erring countrymen and rouse them from the deep slumber which had seized them and made them lethargic. After this incident he was a changed person and cried out his heart to God saying, "God is the only truth, Sat..." Those who saw him in this state imagined that he had become mad. He was taken to a Vaidya (an Ayurvedic doctor) for treatment, but it did him no good.

Nanak felt that all religions were different pathways to reach the same God. So he started visiting mosques and offer Namaz in the traditional style. An interesting incident is described during one of the Namaz sessions. A Nawab had come to join in the Namaz. While he was doing so, Nanak began to laugh. The Nawab felt annoyed and considered that it was sacrilegious to behave in this manner. But Nanak

said, "Sir, you are only pretending to offer prayers, when in fact you are thinking of the horses you have purchased. The kazi's mind is also elsewhere, because he is thinking of his new-born child. What is the use of such prayers when the mind is wandering like an unbridled horse?" The Nawab and the Kazi confessed about their wandering thoughts, but how could Nanak know all that? From that time Nanak began to be addressed as Guru Nanak. He began his mission of preaching, accompanied by some of his friends and disciples who joined him.

Nanak's preaching was an emphasis on the 'SAT NAM' or 'OMKAAR' which was the surest way of reaching God. Wherever he went, people listened to him attentively and were drawn to him by his compassionate looks and his wise words. To all questions put to him on spiritual matters, he gave a very convincing and satisfying reply. For thirty-five years, he went from one end of the country to another, spreading the message of truth and wisdom. Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists were all attracted to him. In his quest for truth he also went to Mecca and Medina, the holy places of worship for all Musalmans. He also visited Jerusalem, the holy place for Christians. He also went to Turkey and then came to Ceylon in the south. It is said that Nanak performed many miracles during his visits and all were deeply impressed by his divine powers.

After his return Nanak Dev completed the 'Udasis', and collected his disciples at Dera Baba, on the banks of river Beas and laid the foundation of a new city named 'Kartarpur Raqba', or 'God's city'. A Dharma Shala (or an inn) was constructed there for the convenience of the visiting pilgrims. He started a 'Langar' there for free distribution of food and a community kitchen where all could join without any distinction. He also laid the foundation of a new religion and chose Bhai Lchna as his successor and named him 'Angad' and said that he was part of his own body or 'Anga'. On 22nd September 1539, Guru Nanak Dev, at the age of seventy, merged in the eternal light. It is said that after his death, a scuffle arose between his Hindu and Muslim followers as the

former wanted to cremate the body, whereas the latter wanted a burial. When the sheet covering the body was taken off, there was no body, but a heap of sweet smelling flowers only. These were equally distributed and then disposed off according to their wishes.

Nanak Dev's life was unique in many respects. He preached about the equality of all human beings. The Guru wrote many books such as 'Maru S the', 'Asa-di-war', 'Japjee' and 'Sro Rag'. The word 'Sikh' is a derivative of the Sanskrit word 'Shishya' meaning disciples. Guru Nanak was the first of the ten Gurus who lived as under:

1.	Guru Nanak	from 1469 to 1539	70 years
2.	Guru Angad	from 1539 to 1552	13 years
3.	Guru Amardas	from 1552 to 1574	22 years
4.	Guru Ram Das	from 1574 to 1581	7 years
5.	Guru Arjun Das	from 1581 to 1606	25 years
6.	Guru Har Govind	from 1606 to 1645	39 years
7.	Guru Har Rai	from 1645 to 1661	16 years
8.	Guru Har Kishan	from 1661 to 1664	3 years
9.	Guru Teg Bahadur	from 1664 to 1675	11 years
10.	Guru Govind Singh	from 1675 to 1708	25 years.

Lives of the last two Gurus will be described separately.

## GURU TEG BAHADUR

When Guru Harkishan suddenly passed away while he was at Delhi on an invitation from Emperor Aurangzeb, there was a clamour for his succession, as the deceased Guru had made no clear declaration about the next Guru. There were numerous claimants, about twenty-one and everyone aspired to become the next Guru. At this time, a rich trader named Makhan Singh, who carried out trade overseas, was caught in a storm while on the high seas. It appeared that death and destruction were imminent. Makhan Singh prayed to the Gurus and said that if he was saved, he would offer five hundred gold Mohurs to the Guru. It so happened that the storm abated and Makhan Singh and his ship were saved. On arrival in India, he learnt about the demise of Guru Harkishan and also about the various contestants for succession. He approached all of them one by one and offered one gold Mohur each, which was thankfully accepted with blessings galore. When he approached Teg Bahadur and gave him one gold Mohur, the latter enquired about the remaining 499 Mohurs which had been promised. Makhan Singh recognised that he alone was the true Guru being omniscient.

Guru Teg Bahadur was thereafter accepted as the ninth Guru, though there was fresh trouble. His nephew Dhirmal also aspired for the coveted place and openly made his claims and even conspired with his colleagues to kill Guru Teg Bahadur. The conspiracy came to light and along with his associates, he was caught and produced before Guru Teg Bahadur for punishment. Guru Teg Bahadur was too magnanimous to avenge the insults heaped on him. He gave a free pardon to Dhirmal and assured him that he bore no ill-will towards him or his associates. He said, "Forgiveness and returning good for evil is the supreme Sikh Dharma." All were then reconciled to him and accepted his supremacy.

On 1st April 1621, just when the dawn was breaking, a child was born to Guru Har Gobind and his wife Nanki, in

the holy city of Amritsar. He was named 'Tyagmal'. The father blessed him that when he grows, he should keep up the spirit of self-sacrifice and live upto the name he bore. When only four years old, Tyagmal was taken by his father to Bhai Buddha, who had been his own preceptor and entrusted the child to his care. Tyagmal learnt from his teacher all the sciences, languages and also the use of weapons. At the end of three and half years, he was initiated as a 'Sikh' and became intensely interested in spiritual themes. His father's teachings had made a deep impression on him. From his father he learnt that "a truly religious man is one who is wise and fearless and has an abiding and unswerving faith in God and is ready and prepared to sacrifice his all, and even his life, in the cause of his faith."

At the age of eleven, he was married to Gujri. When just fourteen he fought a battle along with his father against the Mughals who had attacked the Sikhs. The enemy was crushed and defeated. Tyagmal had fought like a lion and in recognition of his bravery, his father renamed him as 'Tegh Bahadur' meaning 'Knight of the Sword'. Guru Har Gobind passed away at Kartarpur in 1644 and had appointed Har Rai as his successor. Har Rai was the grandson of Guru Har Gobind and a nephew of Teg Bahadur. He set out with his mother Nanki and wife Gujri to settle down in the village Bakala to continue his spiritual life. He lived here for twenty years and continued his pursuits. Meanwhile Guru Har Rai died in 1661 and was succeeded by Guru Har Kishan who died in 1664. Guru Teg Bahadur was then chosen. After becoming Guru, he visited Amritsar and prayed at Har Mandir Sahib which was built by his grandfather. While he was passing through Ropar the Nawab of Saisabad requested him to be his guest to which the Guru readily agreed. At his departure the Nawab offered many valuable gifts including camels, horses and utensils for the community kitchen. From there the Guru along with his disciples, went to Varanasi. When his disciples wanted to bathe in the Ganges, he remarked that if there was a pure heart like the Ganges, the river would appear anywhere. He asked them to dig the floor and true enough Ganges water soon flowed out.

He visited Kartarpur and wanted to settle down there, but Dhirmal and his colleagues were still hostile to him and created many problems. Guru Teg Bahadur obtained a piece of land at Makhewal from the King of Kehlur. A township was built at the place which came to be known as Anandpur Sahib. But even here Dhirmal did not allow him any peace and created one problem after another. He was reported to the Emperor Aurangzeb as a person conspiring against Mughal rule. The Raja of Jaipur interceded on his behalf and declared that Guru Teg Bahadur was a real spiritual leader and had no political ambition. The Raja, however, advised the Guru to leave the place and go elsewhere for his safety. The Guru along with his disciples travelled towards Patna, where he left his wife with some of his relatives as her period of confinement was fast approaching. While at Dacca, he learnt about the news of the birth of a son at Patna. The Guru stayed in Assam for two years as the guest of Raja Ram Singh. The Guru found that some evil spirits were creating trouble for the Raja and his tribe the Ahoms. With his spiritual powers, the Guru overcame their sorcery and freed the king and his people. The whole state was overjoyed at their liberation and offered grateful thanks to the Guru.

The Guru along with his disciples returned to Patna and joined his family. They all returned to Anandpur Sahib and lived there. He spent his time in preaching. Hindus and Muslims in great numbers became his disciples. Persecution by the Moghals was at its peak and many persons from Kashmir approached the Guru to take up their cause. He wrote to the Emperor and requested him to stop atrocities and counselled him that no religion permitted such a course. The Emperor in turn asked him to come to Delhi when they could discuss the matter.

The Guru in good faith accepted the invitation, but when he came to Delhi, the Emperor locked him up in a Kotwali in Chandni Chowk. He was threatened that unless he embraced Islam he would be executed. The Guru of course treated this suggestion with a contempt that it deserved, though Aurangzeb tried all his methods to convert the Guru. The Guru's devoted disciples Bhai Mati Das, Bhai

Dayala and Bhai Sati Das were tortured to death. The Guru remained calm inspite of these provocations. Finding that the Guru was not afraid, Aurangzeb got him beheaded. One disciple, Bhai Jetha, stole the cut-head and another disciple, Lachi Shah, stole the body and carried them home and set the house on fire, thus cremating the dead body. Bhai Jetha, however, managed to carry the head to Kartarpur and delivered it to the Guru's son Gobind Rai. The head was carried in a palanquin and ceremoniously cremated at Anandpur Sahib. Govind Singh (later Guru Gobind Singh) performed the last funeral obsequies of his deceased father. His ashes were collected in a pot and then buried. This spot was identified a hundred years later in 1775. At this spot now stands Gurudwara Rakabganj, near the Central Secretariat, New Delhi. It has become a hallowed place.

Thus died Guru Teg Bahadur. By his manner of death he immortalised himself and made the Sikh religion strong and durable. He set a peerless example for his followers.

## GURU GOBIND SINGH

While it was Guru Nanak Dev who founded the Sikh religion, the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh was instrumental in making the religion fully institutionalised and placing it on a permanent footing. The first four Sikh Gurus namely, Guru Nanak (1469-1539), Guru Angad (1539-1552), Guru Amar Das (1552-1574) and Guru Ram Das (1574-1581) were all primarily religious leaders. The fourth Guru Ram Das was a highly respected leader. He was patronised by the Moghal Emperor Akbar, who gave him the site where the Golden Temple is now built and which became the headquarters of the Sikh religion. The fifth Guru, Guru Arjun compiled the '*Adi Granth*'. He was tortured and persecuted and ultimately put to death by the Moghal Emporer Jahangir in 1606 A.D. The sixth Guru, Guru Har Gobind was imprisoned for 12 years. It was during his time that the religion acquired a militant approach. The seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai (1630-1664) and the eighth Guru Hari Kishan (1656-64) had no significant contribution to make. The ninth Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur was executed. He refused to embrace Islam, when asked to do so by Emperor Aurangzeb and thus, became a martyr. Guru Gobind Singh was the tenth and the last of the Sikh Gurus.

He came nearly two hundred years after Guru Nanak Dev. He was born at Patna on 26th October 1666. His childhood was spent under the care of his mother Gujri, as his father Guru Teg Bahadur was away in Bengal and Assam. His maternal uncle Kirpalchand became his loving guardian. He engaged in mock battles when still a child and thus showed signs of his bravery and militancy. He was only nine years old when his father, Guru Teg Babadur was executed by Aurangzeb. It was through his efforts that the dead body of father, which had been hung up for public display outside the Kotwali at Delhi to teach a lesson to others, was recovered and cremated according to religious rites. Later on in his famous book, '*Vichitra Natak*', Guru Gobind Singh wrote, "For the sake of Dharma what did my

father do? He gave his head, but did not allow his mind to waver. I want to follow in his footsteps."

Guru Gobind Singh had his early education in Hindi, Persian and Sanskrit. He received military training with Bagh Singh who was a Rajput. He was a remarkably brilliant student and whatever he learnt or studied was quickly grasped and mastered. His father, Guru Teg Bahadur, before leaving for Delhi at the behest of Emperor Aurangzeb, had left a message for his infant son which read as under:

"As willed by the Akal Purakh (the Eternal One), I am leaving for Delhi to lay down and sacrifice my life for religious freedom. You are to see that my body is not put to disgrace and that it is cremated properly and with all due honours. I am bequeathing the leadership of the Faith in your hands. You should carry out the same gloriously, even if it costs your life." For Guru Gobind Singh it was a command from God and he carried out his father's wishes to the letter.

The period between 1675 and 1699 was the pre-Khalsa period and the Guru remained at Paonta Sahib to consolidate his position as also to remain away from Aurangzeb.

Gobind Singh was married to Sundari, daughter of Ram Charan of Lahore when he was eighteen. When he was twenty-two, a son was born, who was named Ajit. During the next twelve years, he had three sons from his first wife, Jito Devi. He was thirty-four then. Guru Gobind Singh was a scholar of Sanskrit. He wanted to popularize it amongst the Sikhs. For this purpose, he employed many Brahmin Pandits and sent them to Benaras to become good scholars of Sanskrit, so that they could teach the language.

He was a great devotee of Mother Goddess Durga and desired to invoke Her blessings, so that the Sikh community could be transformed into a heroic nation and be able to fight the Muslim Kings. For this purpose, he arranged for Puja on a grand scale at a place near Naini and invited Pandits from Benaras to conduct the Puja. The worship went on for four months. He was so devoted to the Puja that people thought

that he had become mentally unsettled. At the end of the Puja he cut off one of his fingers and with the blood made offerings to the Goddess.

A large gathering had collected outside the Puja hall. The Guru came out and addressing the gathering said, "For the good of the country and our people, a human sacrifice is now required to propitiate the Goddess. Now, who is prepared to offer himself?" One man came out of the gathering and he was taken inside the hall. The Guru came out and wanted a second human sacrifice. The second man was then led inside. In this manner a total of five persons offered their lives. After this test of devotion, the Guru came out and presented the five men as the truly elect. Addressing the gathering he said, "In Guru Nanak's time, a test was held and Guru Angad was the person chosen. Now there are five persons, who have offered their lives. Baba Nanak taught us humility and wanted us to purify by taking the water used for washing the feet of the Guru. I am going to infuse manliness in you. You shall be no longer 'Sishyas' or Sikhs, but you shall become 'Singhs' or lions." After this sermon, a pitcher full of water was brought. The Guru dipped his sword and asked the five heroes to drink the water. The command was obeyed and they shouted, "Vahe Guru, Guru ki Fateh", meaning "Hail the Guru. Victory to him". When they stood up, Guru Gobind Singh said that you are now 'Singhs'.

He enjoined on his followers to always have the five 'Ks' on their persons, i.e., Kesha or hair, Kripaṇ or a sword, Kangha or a comb, Kachha or a tight underwear and a Kada or an iron bangle. He asked the followers to be always ready to help the needy. He also desired them to take bath regularly and read carefully the 'Granth Sahib'. All Sikhs were brothers. Persons following these disciplines were to be called Khalsa, meaning 'pure'. Guru Gobind Singh then stood up and offered his respects to the five heroes, now called 'Panj Piyaras' or the 'five dear ones' and requested them to admit him to the order. He then told his followers that he was no more their Guru, but only their brother and servant. The Khalsa was the Guru.

The Khalsa organisation grew and expanded by leaps and bounds. An old farmer brought his daughter Sahib Devi and offered her to Guru Gobind Singh, who remarked that every woman was now his mother. She was, however, admitted to the Order and was regarded by the followers as the Holy Mother of the Khalsa and thereafter addressed as Mataji.

Guru Gobind Singh now turned his eyes to build up a strong army to fight the enemies. Every family was asked to nominate at least four men. Thus the army grew into an eight-thousand strong. Guns and other weapons were also contributed. At Anandpur Sahib a factory was built to manufacture arms and guns. Four fortresses were also built to provide shelter to the army. Warring chieftains were pacified and urged to join his command. The position of the Sikhs was thus consolidated. He aroused the spirit of the people by awakening their consciousness and resist the wrongs and injustices meted out to them.

He wrote many inspiring poems in Hindi and Gurmukhi to make people conscious of their religion. The literature brought about a tremendous social and political awakening amongst the masses. Some of the Hindu chieftains, who were apprehensive of his growing popularity, approached Emperor Aurangzeb who sent Wazir Khan, the Governor of Sirhind to apprehend Guru Gobind Singh. In 1703, a siege was laid round the fortress, where the Guru lived with his family. The siege lasted for five months. Ultimately the Guru and his followers had to seek refuge in the kingdom of Patiala. But in the process, his two sons were killed. His other two sons were entombed in a wall which was built to kill them by suffocation. At Patiala, the Guru wrote many books, e.g. 'Vichitra Natak', 'Akhal Stuti', 'Charitropakhyam' and 'Sabda Hazaar'.

At the death of Aurangzeb, his son Bahadur Shah ascended the throne. Bahadur Shah's younger brother, who was camping in Deccan invaded Delhi. Bahadur Shah concluded a treaty with Guru Gobind Singh promising to reverse the policy of his father and become friendly, if the

Guru supported him against his brother's invading army. The treaty that was concluded with Bahadur Shah laid down the following conditions:

1. In the Punjab, no Hindu would be forcibly converted to Islam.
2. The Khalsa will not fight against the Muslims.
3. The Hindus and Sikhs will be permitted to practice their own religions without any hindrance.
4. Non-Muslims should not be asked to pay extra taxes.
5. Sikh farmers will be permitted a concession of fifty per cent in land revenue taxation.
6. Cow-slaughter will be banned in Punjab.

Bahadur Shah requested the Guru to accompany him during his visit to the Deccan. While they were camping near Nasik, two Muslims, who were masquerading as Sikhs, but bore an enmity towards the Guru, stabbed him. On hearing about it, King Bahadur Shah sent one of his own physicians to treat the Guru, but it was too late; though he lived for some days after the attack. He knew that his end was near. He forbade his followers to observe any formal funeral rites and that no one was to weep at his death. He, however, desired that Guru Granth Sahib be recited for forty days. He told them that there would be no Guru after his death and the Holy Granth would be their Guru. He bathed and dressed like a hero going to a battle and retired to his tent forbidding any entry. He sat inside in deep meditation.

Thus died Guru Gobind Singh when he was only forty-two. He left behind him a band of followers utterly devoted to his cause and willing to sacrifice their all for the sake of Khalsa. Sikhism in its final shape owes tremendously to the Guru's leadership, the tenth and the last of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Gobind Singh may have died, but not his name, because his deeds are alive even today and inspire millions of Sikhs.

## SANT BULLESHAH

Sant Bulleshah was a great Sufi saint. His background and place of birth are not exactly known. Some writers have mentioned that he was the king of Balakh. He had developed a sense of renunciation and his mind was withdrawn from earthly affairs. He called his ministers, had his son crowned as king and left his kingdom with a retinue of about two hundred soldiers in search of some renowned mystic saint. He was informed that there lived a great hermit in the forests surrounding Lahore. When he approached the place, he sent a messenger to inform the saint of his arrival. The saint, known as Mir Sahib, enquired how the king had come and who were with him. On being informed that the king was dressed in royal robes and had a retinue of about two hundred soldiers, Mir Sahib declined to see him. On being told, Bulleshah asked his troops to leave him alone and he discarded his royal robes and covering himself with an ordinary sheet, he approached the saint. He was then ordered to spend twelve years with some other saint before coming to him. Bulleshah obeyed the commands and came to meet Mir Sahib after twelve years. The Fakir then accepted him as his disciple and gave him a new name 'Bulla Shah' or 'Bulle Shah'.

According to another story, he was born at Constantinople in the year 1703 or 1760. He was a Sayyad Muslim and from his very childhood he was fond of the company of saints and fakirs. He came to Punjab and met the Sufi saint, Inayat Shah. According to yet another story, he was born in 1737 in a village Pandol in a district of Punjab. His father's name was Muhammad Darvesh. Later, he became a disciple of Inayat Shah, the Sufi saint. He was a free and independent thinker and believed in the universality of all religions. Vedantic philosophy had impressed him greatly. He was a critic of conservatism and traditionalism and did not hesitate to criticise even 'Quran Sharif'. Muslim priests became annoyed at his utterances and persecuted him. He died in

Kasur in 1810. His grave is still there and is visited by many to seek his blessings.

Bulleshah's philosophy is clearly indicative of Sufi influence. He said that if the heart was pure, where was the point in going to a mosque, temple or a church? Purity of heart was a *sine qua non* for spiritual progress. First of all sense if ego has to be destroyed. It is useless to visit Mecca or Medina, if the egoism has not been destroyed. He said, "I have found God within me, and that is my final goal. One must get absorbed in His contemplation and even if there is a stiff opposition from the world, say without fear, 'Well you are right'."

His compositions reveal a spirit of gay abandon. "My God is my beloved and He always gives joy and peace. Once a person has tasted this love, he desires for nothing else." His utterances establish his faith in the universality of all religions and monotheism. He exhorted his audience to discard narrow parochialism and then perceive truth, which is an experience of another dimension, where no distinctions of caste, colour or creed exist. It is no use studying and spending a whole life-time in studying the holy scriptures, if the heart has not been changed and purified. God is immanent in everything and our attitudes should transcend narrow dividing lines between man and man. This is clearly Advaitic philosophy. Kabir's philosophy made a great influence on his thinking. His poems propagate the same universalism and remind the readers of Kabir's *Ramainis*.

Bulle Shah was indeed a great saint, because he saw God in all life around him.

## SANT SHEIKH FARID

It is not known when Sheikh Farid was born and who were his parents. It is however, surmised that it was sometime in the beginning of sixteenth century. He had also been called Farid II. He has been acknowledged as a great saint by all. Some of his compositions are included in the great Sikh holy scripture '*Guru Granth Sahib*'. He had intimate discussions with Guru Nanak Deo on matters spiritual as well as temporal. On one occasion he asked the great Guru, as to why he was having a family and household and still pursuing spiritual matters. The Guru replied that family life and spiritual lives were not incompatible. One can always think of God while in the midst of family life.

Sheikh Farid has also been called Shcikh Ibrahim. Sheikh Farid propounded a philosophy of universal religion and of God being only one without a second. No one was high or low in the eyes of God. Once he said, "In this great stretch of water there is one bird and it has to find its way amidst many hurdles and nets laid down for trapping it. Only God is the ultimate succour." At another place he said that a human being is like a bride, while death is the bridegroom. No one can say when the marriage will actually take place, though it is a certainty and cannot be avoided or evaded at any cost.

Faid's sayings are very popular, because he uscd parables that are understood by all. He cited common examples of everyday life. Thus they made a great impression on his listeners. His teachings closely follow the Sufi philosophy. He said, "O Farid, when God is immanent in everything, and the entire creation is His making, how can any one say that one is high or another is low. Those who have developed great love for God, alone are true devotees, but those who say one thing and act in another, are really a burdon for this world." And again, "See, the dust is something we trample when living, but we are buried under the same dust after death." He enjoined on all to practise simple living. Just a

piece of bread and water are enough to sustain our lives. One should not go begging alms or asking for charity.

A true saint indeed.

## HAZRAT NIZAMUDDIN AULIA

Mohammad bin Ahmed bin Daniyal al Bukhari was born in 1238 at Badayun (in U.P.). Later on he came to be known as Nizamuddin. He belonged to a family of Bukhara. His grand-parents had settled down in India. His father died when he was only five years old and he was brought up by his mother who was an extraordinarily pious woman. Nizamuddin naturally grew up in extremely spiritual atmosphere. He developed a great devotion towards Baba Farid and met him when the saint was at Ayodhya. His spiritual development under his Master was rapid and steady. Baba Farid was extremely fond of him and he sent him to Delhi as his representative. Nizamuddin died there in 1325. A huge mausoleum has been built there drawing thousands of devotees to this day.

Hazrat Nizamuddin possessed many occult powers. Many nobles became his disciples. His famous saying in Persian, '*Hanoz Dilli dur Asi*' meaning 'Dilli is yet far off acquired the reputation of being a proverb. King Ghiasuddin Tughlak marched towards Delhi to teach a lesson to Hazrat Nizammudin. The saint was informed about the king's intentions and he then made the remark quoted above. The king died on the way and the invasion never came about. Due to his saintliness, the Hazrat earned many other titles such as 'Mehbood-i-Ilahi' meaning 'beloved of God', and 'Sultan-i-Awalia' or the 'king of saints'. He died at the age of 91 and lies buried at Nizamuddin, which is a suburb of Delhi.

Amir Khusro was one of his devoted disciples. Amir Khusro was a well known Persian poet and is also known as a protagonist of Hindi language. He was born at Etah and led an extremely chequered life. Following the death of his Master, Hazrat Nizamuddin, Amir Khusro also died in 1325.

Khwaja Nizamuddin had named Nasiruddin as his successor. Nasiruddin died in 1356.

## BABA FARIDUDDIN SHAKARGANJ

Sheikh Fariduddin Mas'ud Shakarganj, who succeeded Qutubuddin, was born in a noble Afghan family. During the invasion by Chengez Khan, his father had taken refuge in Punjab and was appointed Qadi of Kathwal. Shcikh Fariduddin was born at this place. He was a deeply religious person from his very childhood. His Master Qutubuddin initiated him into the mystical path. He became famous due to his piety and devotion and crowds of Muslims as well as Hindus were drawn to him. It is said that once he continued his prayers for forty days and suspended his body into a well, much after the manner of Hathyogis.

There is an interesting legend how he came to be known as 'Shakarganj'. It is said that his mother was an extremely pious woman and had enjoined her son to offer his prayers daily without a break. As an incentive, she would keep some sweets beneath the prayer-carpet. After the prayers, the boy would find the sweets when the carpet was rolled. Once the mother forgot to place the sweets and yet when Farid rolled the carpet, the sweets were there. It was a miracle indeed. Farid came to be known as 'Skaraganj' meaning 'treasure of sweets'.

Baba Farid died at the age of 93 towards 1265. His body was laid to rest at Pak Pattan in Multan District. His URS is celebrated on the fifth day of Muslim month during Muharram. His mausoleum was built, entrance to which is through the big gate, called 'Bhisti Darwaza', meaning 'door to Paradise'.

Baba Fariduddin is a highly respected Muslim saint.

## BABA QUTUBUDDIN KAKI

He was the chief successor of the great Sufi saint and mystic Moinuddin Chisti. He is known by two titles: 'Bakhtiar' meaning 'a friend of fortune', a title given to him by his Master Moinuddin Chisti and 'Kaki' meaning 'man of cakes'. There is a tank in Delhi known as Shamsiya. Kaki is credited with producing cakes for the hungry masses by dipping his hands into the waters of this tank. This had been testified by Hazrat Nizamuddin who was second in the line of succession of Moinuddin Chisti. Kaki was born in the year 1186 at Farghana in Isafan. He claimed his lineage from the Prophet.

It is said that Qutubuddin Kaki himself selected the spot where his body was to be buried and also named the persons who had to wash the dead body.

Qutubuddin named Fariduddin as his successor a little before his death. As Fariduddin could not be found, he left behind him a series of articles in the custody of his other disciples to be handed over to Fariduddin. These were: a prayer-carpet, shoes and staff which he had himself received from his Master. These relics are handed over from the Master to his successor as enjoined by the Chisti Order.

A characteristic feature of this Order is its attitude towards music. Orthodox Muslim opinion looks with disapproval towards music near a mosque, but Qutubuddin favoured music and held music festivals 'sama' meaning 'hearing'. In his view music which was a harmony of sounds helped man to harmonise his own self. The orthodox Muslim Ulemas petitioned to King Altamush to ban the playing of music and this was done. Popular revolt against this ban however, triumphed and the playing of music still continues.

## LAL DIDI OF KASHMIR

Lalla Yogeshwari, Lal Dev or Lalla Didi was a saint poetess of Kashmir in the fourteenth century. She was a great mystic poet. Her compositions are sung in many Kashmiri households even today. Current in her times was Shiva-worship and she followed the same cult. She propounded Shaiva-philosophy and established the aspirations and hopes of the masses. Sir Richard Carnac Temple wrote a book on her, titled 'The Words of Lal the Poetess'. He has quoted Anand Kaul in his introduction to the book and said, "Lal Vakhi (Vani or Words) has touched the very core of the heart of Kashmiris, and is sweet like nectar for them. Her words are often quoted as sayings on popular occasions by the common man. Lal Vakhi has shaped popular thinking and has brought out their inspirations." Sir George Grierson, the eminent linguist and Dr Lionel Bonnet have jointly edited an article that appeared in the Monograph (Vol XVIII) of Royal Asiatic Society, titled 'The Lalla Vakyani or Wise Sayings of Lal Didi or (Lailla), a mystic poetess of Ancient Kashmir.' Besides this, Pandit Anand Kaul has also written a book, 'Lalla Yogeshwari: Her Life and Sayings'. No other literature is available about this great woman of Kashmir.

According to Pandit Anand Kaul, Lal Didi belonged to the fourteenth century A.D. The great Persian Sufi Saint Sayyad Ali Hamdani (1379-80 to 1385-86), who visited Kashmir, was a contemporary of Lalla Didi.

Lal Didi was born in the family of a Kashmiri Pandit in Pandeyan, a village very near Srinagar. Many fictions have been joined to facts about her birth and it is widely believed that she fully remembered her past life and was able to identify many things belonging to that period. It is said that Lalla Didi and her husband never lived together. She was much harassed by her mother-in-law, who was a very hard task master and condemned Lalla Didi in every thing. Lalla was an extremely tolerant person and accepted the suffering

in a very quiet way and never protested against the almost inhuman treatment. May be this was due to her propensities towards God from her childhood, due to which she had developed a stoic philosophy towards life. But eventually she left her home and became a disciple of the Shaiva saint, Said Bayu. Some say that the saint was actually the great Siddha Shrikant.

Lalla Didi often participated in spiritual discourses and some times she was even one-up over her teacher. She became a Shiva Yogini. Like the legendary Brahma-vadini Gargi, she wandered all over the state only half clad. She did not care much about what the people thought or said about her dress. Pandit Anand Kaul has narrated an interesting incident in this connection. Once some street boys teased her for her manner of dress till a shop-keeper selling textiles came to her rescue and chased the boys. Lalla asked him for some cloth which was gladly given. Lalla tore the cloth in two equal pieces and flung one such piece on one shoulder and the other on the other shoulder. Whenever some people ridiculed her, she took away one piece and tied a knot. When someone applauded her, she took the other piece and tied a similar knot. In the evening there were many such knots. She came to the shop-owner and requested him to weigh the two pieces. Of course, there was no change in their weights. "What is the difference then? Prasic or abuse makes no difference." She returned the two pieces and continued to wander as before.

Lal Didi composed songs in honour of God and wandered all over Kashmir singing and enthraling the entire people. She lived quite long and ended her earthly sojourn near a Masjid, about twenty-five miles away from Srinagar. The flame of life illuminated the entire arca at the time of her death, much to the surprise of those who witnessed it. Lalla Didi wrote her poems "Lalla Vakyani" in old Kashmiri dialect. Sanskrit was the acknowledged language of the elite and the learned. But common man understood the language spoken in their region. Lalla Didi's compositions therefore, were understood by all. Its mystic and spiritual content made

direct appeal to listeners and readers and achieved instant popularity.

Lalla Didi's verses touch a variety of subjects, like Yoga, Self-realisation and deep mysticism. Here are a few samples rendered in English, albeit free-hand:

"I searched and searched for Him,  
Till my eyes were filled with love,  
And a strong desire within,  
And I saw the True form and my eyes and vision were  
blessed.

"Everywhere there is the glory of Lord Shiva,  
There is no limit to His powers.  
Then everything appears like a dream,  
Now it is there, now it is not."

Many such verses can be quoted which bring out the real greatness of this saint-poetess, who lived as she preached and preached as she lived.

**2.**

**EASTERN REGION**  
**(Assam, Bengal and Orrisa)**



## SRI RAMKRISHNA PARAMHANS

Khudiram Chattopadhyaya and his wife Chandramani lived a quiet life in a village, Derapur, District Hoogly in Bengal. They had good landed property of about fifty acres and lived comfortably. Their tutelary deity was Sri Ram Chandra whom they devotedly worshipped. In 1814, the local landlord became his enemy, because Khudiram refused to falsely testify in his favour in a case of litigation. Khudiram was thereafter hounded and had therefore, to leave the village along with abandoning his land and property. He then moved to a nearby village Kamarpukur. Through the help of one of his friends, Khudiram was able to procure a small piece of land which for the time being was sufficient to provide subsistence to his family. Kamarpukur was situated on way to Jagannath Puri, the famous Hindu shrine. Many Sadhus and pious men passed that way. Khudiram often met them and had the joy of exchanging views on spiritual matters. His devotion towards his Lord, Sri Ram increased more so, when he found this icon in a nearby paddy field. Khudiram had a son, Ram Kumar. When he grew up, he began to earn and thereby relieve his father of some of his financial worries. Khudiram then undertook a pilgrimage to Rameshwaram in the South. Journey increased his piety and devotion.

When a second son was born, he named him Rameshwari. In 1835, Khudiram went on another pilgrimage, this time to Gaya. There he performed the 'Shraddha' ceremony of his forefathers. There he had a strange vision of Lord Vishnu with a huge mace or Gada and saw in a dream that his ancestors, to whom he had offered oblations, were feasting in the temple of Gadadhar Vishnu. The holy precincts were filled with a radiance that blinded Khudiram's eyes. He woke up and took the dream as an auspicious sign of the coming events. On his return, he found that his wife Chandramani also had similar auspicious dreams. She discovered that she was pregnant. In the early hours of February 18, 1836, a child was born, beautiful and charming beyond words. He

was named Gadadhar, after the Lord's name, whose temple Khudiram had visited. The astrologers, who cast the child's horoscope, predicted a glorious life.

Gadai, as he was called affectionately, was the fourth of Khudiram's five children. He became a favourite of the entire village, because of his charming looks and loving manners. He was admitted to the local school where he made good progress. He however, disliked Mathematics and showed a positive aversion towards the subject. Instead he devoted his time to reading Hindu epics and the ancient Puranic stories which he learnt by heart. One day a peculiar thing happened. He was walking through the narrow path of paddy fields, when he found that the sky was overlaid with dark clouds. Then he saw a row of white cranes flipping across the skies like a brilliant meteor. The sight was so absorbing that looking at it, Gadadhar fell into a trance and fell down unconscious. The puffed rice, which he was holding in one of the folds of his clothes, scattered all over. Some passers-by picked him up and took him home. His parents were very upset over this incident.

That was the first incident of a trans-corporal nature for young Gadadhar. Then he was just six or seven years old. Young Gadai took part in theatrical skits when well-known incidents from the lives of Gods were enacted by the villagers. One such occasion was when Gadadhar played the role of Lord Shiva. He was so carried away by his own dress and the part he was to play that he had another deep trance and was brought back to normal consciousness with great difficulty. Khudiram died in 1843, when Gadadhar was just seven. The eldest brother Ram Kumar assumed charge of the family and its affairs.

Young Gadadhar felt greatly afflicted at his father's death and remained attached to his widowed mother. During this period, he frequented the cremation grounds and remained lost in solitary meditation. He also spent his time with the Sadhus and monks going to Jagannath Puri the famous shrine. Once he was so carried away by their manners and dress that he donned ochre clothes. His mother was aghast

to see him like that. Gadadhar however, assured her that it was merely an act of indulgence on his part and he had no intentions of taking Sanyas. The mother however, made him take a promise that he would never take Sanyas till he had her consent. Gadadhar readily gave this assurance. At the age of nine Upnayanam ceremony was performed. Gadadhar now became a 'Dwij' or twice-born i.e. a true Brahmin. It is significant that soon after this ceremony, Gadadhar did not go to his mother to solicit alms, as is enjoined by the Shastras, but approached Dhani, the Shudra blacksmith-woman who had tended him with great care during his infancy. His emphatic teaching by this symbolic act was that caste does not lie in birth, but in the qualities of the heart.

Gadadhar continued to enact the part of various characters of Puranic lore. He was completely identified with the roles and actually lived them. Later on he said, "Do you know what happens? When I intensively think of God in my heart, I feel His presence there."

In the meanwhile another tragedy overtook the family in the death of Ram Kumar's wife, leaving behind an infant son. The grand-mother had to take his charge. Due to financial troubles, the family contracted small debts. So Ram Kumar had to move to Calcutta to explore the possibility of supplementing his income. He opened a Sanskrit school in the heart of the town. As soon as the school made some progress, Ram Kumar left his younger brother Rameshwar to look after the household as also the aged mother and called Gadadhar to Calcutta. Gadadhar had no inclination for studies and told his brother so frankly. But his simplicity and winning manners soon endeared him to all. They would gather around him to enjoy his company and engrossing talks. Ram Kumar, the elder brother, once admonished Gadadhar for neglecting his studies. Gadadhar silenced him by saying that he was more interested in spiritual matters and less in books.

A rich widow, named Rani Rasmani, who was Shudra by caste, lived in Calcutta. She acquired plenty of land on the eastern bank of the Ganges at Dakshineshwar, about four

miles to the north of Calcutta. A temple dedicated to the worship of Goddess Kali was constructed on it. In the same compound another temple for the worship of Lord Krishna and Radha was also built. Both the temples were connected by an upper terrace above the Ganges between a double row of twelve Shiva shrines. There was a spacious music hall and rooms for temple staff. A beautiful garden with two tanks also came up as also a big banyan tree, which became memorable due to subsequent events.

Ram Kumar took over the priesthood of the temple when it was consecrated on May 11, 1855. He was soon joined by his brother Gadadhar, who at once took an extreme liking for the place, because of its quietness and seclusion. He could now freely follow his spiritual pursuits. At this time Hriday, his nephew, joined him and remained his faithful companion for the next twenty-five years. Mathur Babu (Mathura Nath Biswas), son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, took a great fancy for young Gadadhar and made him responsible for attending to the decoration of the idol of Mother Goddess. The temple of Kali was an imposing construction with the bisalt figure of the Goddess, dressed in costly Banarasi brocade and silk, shown as dancing on the prostrate body of Lord Shiva. In her arms she held a sword and in another a severed human head. She seemed to say, "Come, Fear not." It was all symbolic. She was the Mother Nature, fierce and frightening and yet benign and assuring. Her eyes were wide open and She seemed to say, "I know everything. I protect and destroy. The virtuous need have no fear, but the evildoers, I will punish. Come and surrender yourself. Surrender all your evils and take from me all holiness and grace which I grant".

Gadadhar was at once taken completely by what he saw. She became for him the living God with Her dark blue skin. She represented Mother Nature and Universal Energy. She became a living thing for Gadadhar. He thought that she walked, smiled and even spoke, provided one had eyes to see and ears to hear. He was soon associated with all the work connected with the temple. He dressed Her, undressed Her and offered Her food and flowers. Whether waking or asleep,

the Mother lived with him constantly. Thus his spiritual progress continued.

One day, while the priest of Radhakrishna Temple was carrying the idol of Lord Krishna to the ratiring room for night's rest, as was the custom, he slipped. The idol fell and one of the legs was broken. Pandits advised that the idol be immersed in the Ganges, as a mutilated one could not be worshipped. Gadadhar was against this advice and insisted that the damage be repaired, the idol installed and worshipped as before. Rani Rasmani was in a fix. Gadadhar however, said that if by misfortune her son-in-law Mathur Babu sustained a fracture, would she discard him? If not, how could the idol of the Lord be given that shabby treatment? The argument was very sound, but no one could say what to do. In the end it was decided that Gadadhar should undertake the work of repair. If the idol stood the test, then only his word would be accepted. Gadadhar took up the challenge and did an immensely difficult job after working day and night. The idol was so perfectly joined that it was impossible to find out where the break had occurred. It was installed amidst great jubilation and Gadadhar's respect grew. The elder brother, Ram Kumar was keeping indifferent health. He wanted his younger brother to be initiated into temple worship and take over the work. One such venerable person well versed in the rituals was found and young Gadadhar was placed under his charge. Soon afterwards, Ram Kumar died. Gadadhar felt desolate at this loss and realised the transitoriness of human life.

Gadadhar was now called Ramkrishna and since he had assumed the role of a priest, he plunged into the work wholeheartedly. For him the Goddess was not a stone idol, but a living and vibrant energy and he surrendered to Her completely. He wanted to have a vision of the Goddess. His passion consumed him, so much that he became a raving lunatic, or so the people thought. He shut himself in a corner of the vast garden and was praying and meditating all the time for the Mother to give him the desired vision. He tore off all his clothes. He writhed on the ground and wept bitterly, imploring the Mother to show Her face. Every one noticed his

condition and sympathised with him, pitying him now and mocking at him the next moment. But he wandered in a haphazard manner, caring little about what others thought or said. It is said that some people who saw him in this state, found that his breast was reddened by the mark of blood. May be he had got into the habit of beating his breast when in extreme agony. But the results came for which he had been praying. This is what he has said in this connection:

"One day, I was torn with intolerable anguish. My heart seemed to be wrung as a damp cloth might be wrung... I was racked with pain. A terrible frenzy seized me at the thought that I might never be granted the blessing of the divine vision. I thought, if that were so, then enough of this life. A sword was hanging in the sanctuary of the temple. My eyes fell on it and an idea flashed through my mind like a flash of lightning. 'The sword! it will help me to end it'. I rushed upto it and seized it like a mad man... And lo! the whole scene, doors, window, the temple itself vanished...It seemed as if nothing existed anymore. Instead I saw an ocean of the Spirit, boundless, dazzling. In whatever direction I turned, great luminous waves were rising. They bore down upon me with a loud roar, as if to swallow me up. In an instant they were upon me. They broke over me, they engulfed me. I was suffocated. I lost consciousness and I fell... How I passed that day and the next I know not. Round me rolled an ocean of ineffable joy. And in the depths of my being, I was conscious of the presence of the Divine Mother." (taken from, 'Sri Ramkrishna, the Great Master' by Swami Sardanand, a close devotee of the Master. He died in 1927).

From that day, he was in constant communion with the Holy Mother. He saw her everywhere. He was often seized with fits of madness leading to trance. All this took place when he was just twenty-two i.e. in 1858. His struggle was not yet over. He had to ascend many steps before he could become a Paramhans. He went to Kamarpukur and his mother was much grieved to notice his condition. She thought of finding a bride for him, so that he would come back to normalcy or near-normalcy. A frantic search was made to find suitable girl. Ramkrishna was greatly amused

at this and then told his mother, "Why are you looking all over. Go to Jayrambati and you will find the girl destined to be married to me." And so they found Shardarani, daughter of Ramchandra Mukhopadhyaya. She was a child of five, while Ramkrishna was now twenty-five. But that did not matter and the marriage ceremony was performed. The bride returned to her parents after the ceremony. Ramkrishna stayed for a year and half and then returned to Dakshineshwar. He continued his Sadhana for the next six years. He needed a guide now to enable him to steer safely across the seas. The help came in the form of Bhairavi Brahmani and Tota Puri.

One day, from the terrace of the temple, he was watching the boats in the Ganges, when he saw a boat coming to rest at the foot of the terrace. A woman between thirty-five and forty came up the steps. She was tall and beautiful, with long hair hanging loose over her shoulders. She was wearing the Saffron robe of a Sanyasin. Ramkrishna was struck by her appearance. As soon as she saw him, she burst out, "My son, I have been looking for you for a long time." This encounter had all the charm and majesty of a beautiful scenario.

Bhairavi Brahmani, as she was known, was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu and was extremely learned in Bhakti lore. She said that she was looking for the Bhakti-inspired person, whose existence she had known by her powers. Ramkrishna treated her like his mother and confided to her all his trials and tribulations in his spiritual quest. He told her about his mental agonies, the tortures and the sufferings he was confronted within his devotion to Mother Kali. He was aware that many people thought that he was of unsound mind. Bhairavi Brahmani heard him and comforted him with all maternal tenderness. She assured him that he was taking the right path and his ascent to the spiritual peaks was in the right direction. Ramkrishna accepted her as his spiritual mother and took lessons at her feet. She had traversed the roads of knowledge and was aware of the pitfalls and trials. She showed to Ramkrishna how to proceed methodically in conformity with the Tantric Shastras which harden the senses to all the disturbances of the flesh and spirit. Bhairavi recognised in him the true incarnated Spirit.

She called all the local Pandits and scholars and asked the theological authorities to accord to Ramkrishna the respect of an enlightened Spirit. His fame began to spread. People from far and near came to meet him and listen to his talks. Ramkrishna took quick strides in his spiritual journey.

At this time another person, who was to be his guide appeared on the scene. He was Tota Puri, an extraordinary Vedantic ascetic, a wandering monk who had practised extreme austerities for forty years and had acquired many occult powers. He was a mystic of the highest order. Tota Puri first saw Ramkrishna without the latter's knowledge. Seated on one of the steps of the temple, Ramkrishna was lost to the external world and involved in deep meditation. Tota Puri was struck by this sight and approaching Ramkrishna said, "My son, I notice that you have already travelled a long way in pursuit of truth. If you so wish I can initiate you into mystic Vedantic philosophy." With extreme simplicity Ramkrishna replied, "Let me ask the Mother". On receiving the required consent, Ramkrishna accepted Tota Puri as his teacher and guide. Before being initiated he had to pass certain tests like discarding the sacred thread and all his dignity of a temple priest. Ramkrishna had no difficulty in giving up these wordly things, even his personal God in his pursuit of the impersonal God. Tota Puri explained to him the basic tenets of Vedantism and Adwait philosophy. This is what Ramkrishna himself said about the experiences:

"The naked man, Tota Puri, taught me to detach my mind from all objects and to plunge it into the heart of the Atman. But despite all my efforts, I could not cross the realm of name and form and lead my spirit to the unconditioned state. I had no difficulty in detaching my mind from earthly objects with the one exception, of the too radiant form of the Mother, the essence of pure knowledge, who appeared before me as a living reality. She barred the way to the beyond. I tried on several occasions to concentrate my mind on the precepts of the Advaitic philosophy, but each time the form of the Mother intervened. I said to Tota Puri in despair, 'It is no good. I shall never succeed in lifting my spirit to the 'unconditioned' state and find myself face to face with the

Atman!' He replied severely, 'What! you say, you cannot? You must.' Looking about him he found a bit of glass and with it he struck with its point between my eyes, saying, 'Concentrate your mind on this point.' Then I began to meditate with all my might and as soon as the gracious form of the Mother appeared, I used my discrimination as a sword and I clove Her in two. The last barrier fell and my Spirit immediately precipitated itself beyond the plane of the 'conditioned', and I lost myself in Samadhi."

Thus the door to the Inaccessible was forced after great strenuous efforts and the last barriers were removed. Ramkrishna reached the stage of 'Nirvikalp Samadhi' where all distinctions of subject and object disappear. In this stage, Space itself exists no more. The Soul is lost in Self and dualism is blotted out. Ramkrishna had attained in one day what Tota Puri had taken forty years to achieve. "The ascetic was astounded by the experience he had provoked and regarded with awe the body of Ramkrishna, rigid as a corpse for days on end, radiating the sovereign serenity of the Spirit, which had reached the end of all knowledge." Tota Puri was want to stay at any place never for more than three days, but he remained here for eleven months in the company of his disciple, who had outstripped the Master. Their parts were now reversed and the two now met on a different plane altogether.

Ramkrishna was a small sized person with brown complexion, a short beard and beautiful eyes, "full of light, obliquely set and slightly veiled." This is how he has been described by his eminent biographer Mahendra Nath Gupt, who wrote under the name 'M' only. "His mouth was never, never very wide open, but seeing half-closed a great distance both outwardly and inwardly. His mouth was half-open over his white teeth in a bewitching smile, at once affectionate and mischievous. Of medium hight he was thin to emaciated and extremely delicate. His temperament was exceptionally highly strung for he was supersensitive to all the winds of joy and sorrow, both moral and physical. He was indeed a living reflection of all that happened before the mirror of his eyes, a two-sided mirror both out and in. His unique plastic power

allowed his spirit instantaneously to shape itself according to that of others without, however, losing his '*feste burg*', the immutable and infinite centre of endless mobility." "His speech was Bengalee of a homely kind, with a slight though delightful stammer, but his words held men enthralled by the wealth of spiritual experience, the inexhaustible store of simile and metaphor, the unequalled powers of observation, the bright and subtle humour, the wonderful catholicity of sympathy and ceaseless flow of wisdom". This is the description given by an eye witness Nagendranath Gupta.

All this contrasted immensely with his spiritual mentor Tota Puri, who was tall and robust and stood like a rock of Gibraltar, resolute and indestructible. He possessed a constitution of iron and his mind was extremely firm. He had never known illness or physical suffering and regarded them with a contempt. Before taking up wandering life of a monk, he was the head of a monastery with seven hundred monks in Punjab. He was a real Hath Yogi. The 'suffix' Puri showed that he belonged to Sringeri Math in the South according to which a Puri is "one who is full of real knowledge and has mastered the knowledge of Brahman and is therefore, in union with Parbrahman". The Mahavakya of Sringeri Math is '*Tat Twam Asi*', meaning 'That Thou Art'. To him Maya was something non-existent, a void, a lie. But to Ramkrishna Maya itself was God, as in his eyes everything was God. Tota Puri was opposed to all forms of worship and scorned the manner and practices of Ramkrishna. But his devotional songs moved him bringing out hidden tears in his eyes. Tota Puri discovered to his dismay that he was also succumbing to the power of the Divine Mother. He felt completely mastered by this invisible charm and took it as a defeat of his many years of Sadhana. He felt so bad that he decided to destroy the body by drowning in the Ganges. When he entered the stream an invisible power seemed to restrain him and he came out utterly disillusioned. He accepted before Ramkrishna that ultimately Brahman and Maya are the same and it is foolish to make a distinction..

Let us sum up this topic by quoting the words of the Master himself from the Conversations of Ramkrishna with

Naren (Vivekanand) and Mahendranath Gupta on the subject of the theories of Shankara and Ramanuja published in the 'Vedant Kesari' November 1916:

"Kali is none other than He, whom you call Brahman. Kali is primitive Energy (Shakti). When it is inactive, we call it Brahman (literally, we call That). But it has the function of creating, preserving or destroying, we call That Shakti or Kali. He, whom you call Brahman, She, whom I call Kali, are no more different from each other than fire and its action of burning. If you think of the one, you automatically think of the other. To accept Kali, is to accept Brahman. To accept Brahman is to accept Kali. Brahman and His power are identical. That is what I call Shakti or Kali."

The thoughts expressed by Ramkrishna have been the subject matter of interminable discussions between the two schools of Adwait Vedant, as propounded by Shankaracharya and Vishishtadwait, Dwait and Vishudha Adwait. Ramkrishna was inclined towards Ramanujacharya's philosophy, as his own outlook on these matters was rather flexible and he could not adopt the rigid postures of Shankaracharya. Ramkrishna has envisaged two distinct planes and stages of vision: Maya creates the reality of the 'differentiated' universe, and in the perfect Samadhi where one instant's contact with the Infinite is enough to make the Illusion of 'differentiated' egoes, our own ego disappears in the process. He postulated that it was absurd to consider the world as unreal, so long as we form a part of it. This philosophy is indeed very sound and removes may a confusion which a Sadhak feels on the spiritual plane. God has to be perceived inwardly and seen outwardly. And so Ramkrishna said, "Yes! My Divine Mother is none other than the Absolute. She is at the same time the One and the Many and yet beyond the One and the Many... My mother says, 'I am the Mother of the Universe, I am the Brahman of the Vedanta, I am the Atman of the Upanishads. It is I, Brahman, who created differentiation. Good and Bad alike obey Me. The Law of Karma in truth exists; but it is I who make and unmake Laws. I order all Karma, good and bad. Come to Me, either through Love or through Knowledge or through Action (Bhakti, Gyan or Karma), for all lead to

God. I will lead you through this world, the Ocean of action. And if you wish it, I will give you the knowledge of the Absolute as well. You cannot escape from Me. Even those who have realised the Absolute in Samadhi, return to Me at My will."

Ramkrishna's genius was really superb. He roused the Gods from lethargy and slumbering in mere thoughts and made them living and incarnate. Vivekanand later on drew his inspiration from these words and brought about a change in the ethos of the people of the country when he gave his clarion call, "*Awake and Arise. Too Long have You Slept.*"

After the departure of Tota Puri towards the end of 1865, Ramkrishna was in a state of cataleptic ecstasy. His nephew watched over him during these trying months and carefully nursed him.

Ramkrishna felt that all religions were the same and therefore, he tried them one by one. The first to be explored was Islam. He turned towards it at the end of 1866. He met Govind Rai, a Hindu who had embraced Mohammedanism and was a pious and devoted person. Ramkrishna found that he had also realised God through Islam. He asked Govind Rai to initiate him into Islam. After this he left the precincts of the temple and got lost in uttering the name of Allah and wore the robes of a Mussalman and followed all their rules.

Ramkrishna had by now practised all forms of devotion viz. Shanta, Dasya, Sakhya, Vatsalya and Madhur and had realised the goal through them. After he had embraced Islam and practised austerities laid therein, he turned to Christianity and devoted himself to the worship of Jesus Christ and Madonna with the divine child. Ramkrishna exclaimed, "Ah! this is the Master Yogi, the Christ, the embodiment of love, who poured out his heart's blood for the redemption of mankind and suffered agonies for their sake." Ramkrishna also offered worship to Lord Buddha and said about him, "There is not the least doubt about Lord Buddha being an

incarnation of Vishnu. There is no difference between his doctrines and those of the Vedic-Jnana Kanda (Upanishadic teachings)." In his room he kept a small idol of Tirthankar Lord Mahavir before whom incense was burnt in the morning and evening. About the Sikh Gurus, he said that they were all incarnations of King Janak.

All this shows that Ramkrishna was a truly enlightened person and his study and pursuit of all religions convinced him that basically they were all the same and worshipped the same divine energy, using different names.

In 1872, his wife Sharda Rani, who was now eighteen, joined her husband at Dakshineshwar. They were however, husband and wife in name only. At their very first meeting, Ramkrishna had asked her, if she desired him to become a householder or allow him to continue his spiritual quest and way of life. Sharda Rani was a true devotee herself and assured her husband that she was not going to come in the way of his Sadhana and he was free to continue his life as he did. She slept in another room along with Ramkrishna's mother. Actually when there was an occasion for Shodashi Puja of the Goddess, Ramkrishna ceremoniously seated Sharda Rani and offered prayers and worship to her like a true devotee. She was for him a manifestation of the Divine Mother. Both Sharda Rani and Ramkrishna then slipped into a trance.

Ramkrishna took a pilgrimage to the holy places in the company of Mathur Babu and Rani Rasmati. The two soon afterwards died and Ramkrishna devoted more fully to the worship of the Divine Mother. From 1879 onwards, disciples started pouring into Dakshineshwar to seek his guidance and blessings. He gathered round him a band of extremely devoted and zealous disciples, who could be trusted to spread his message. His encounter with Narendranath Datt, who was later known by his monistic name Swami Vivekanand, was really remarkable. Ramkrishna had an intuitive genius in piercing the innermost recesses of a person's heart and could instantaneously find out his intrinsic worth. So it happened with Narendranath Datt, called Naren by his

parents and friends. Naren had a reckless character as a boy, though even then his thoughts about the Unknown were very prominent. When he met Ramkrishna, he at once shot at him his favourite question, "Have you seen God?" "Yes, I have seen Him as I see you. Only it is more intense", replied Ramkrishna. In November 1880, Naren was preparing for his University examination when at the house of one of his friends, Surendranath Mitra, he first saw his future Master, who looked at him with a 'falcon's eye' that seemed to pierce Naren. The Master at once saw him as his potential spiritual heir. When Naren visited him again, he took him to the balcony and burst out, "Naren, where have you been these years? I have been looking for you all over." And thereafter began a period of apprenticeship of the future Vivekanand that lasted for nearly six years. At the end, the Master called Naren and during a Samadhi session, confided to him that his end was fast approaching and that he had transmitted all his powers to the young disciple, who had an important role to play in the history of the nation.

On 15th August 1886, the Master went into a Samadhi in the evening. He regained consciousness after midnight and two minutes past one, he fixed his eyes on the tip of his nose and then entered into the Maha Samadhi. Thus came to a close the earthly life of the great Master. He is called Paramhans, meaning the stage of Masterhood, or 'Arhat' or 'Sthit Prajnya' described in the Geeta. But he had laid a strong foundation for the future generations. The Ramakrishna Missions or the 'Maths', which are now dotted all over the country and outside as well, are doing yeomen service in the cause of humanity without any distinction of caste, colour or creed. He was Jnani par excellence inwardly and a devout Bhakta outwardly. His advice to all was, "Pray to Him in any way you like. He is sure to hear you, for He hears even the foot-fall of an ant."

## MATA SHARADA DEVI

In the Bankura district of Bengal, in a village called Jayramvati, Sharada was born on 22nd December, 1853, in a Brahman family: Jayramvati was just like any other ordinary village. The area was lush green with plants, corn-fields and the small river Amodar making musical sound. It had everything which an attractive village should have. The verdant area imparted to it almost a divine appearance. Sharda's father was Ramachandra Mukhopadhyaya and mother was named Shyam Sundari Devi. The family was poor like any other peasant family. A small piece of land and selling of the holy thread (used during Upnayan ceremony) was their only means of support. But they had a magnanimous heart and even when there was famine, they shared their food with those who were needy.

Sharada Devi showed signs of divinity even as a child. Before she was born her parents had a dream when they were informed that a divine person or goddess was to take birth in their family. When Sharada was born, they rejoiced at the birth of the child, particularly because of the dream which had foretold them of her coming. As a child, Sharada had no formal education. She found little interest in playing with her play-mates. She was fond of making clay idols of Kali, the Goddess and Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu. She would place garlands of flowers round their necks. She would then sit there lost in meditation.

Thus, though denied any formal education, she had spiritual training at its best. When she was only ten, supernatural manifestations could be discerned as she began to have varied spiritual experiences. She had very elementary education and could just write or read. Though she was admitted as a student in the local school, she did not remain there long as she found no attraction. She devoted her time to helping her mother in household matters. But to say that she was uneducated in the literal sense would be grossly

untrue. She attended spiritual discourses, visited temples and other holy places and listened to the stories of gods and goddesses. A spiritual substratum was thus slowly but surely formed within her. She thus imbibed all the grace and beauty that culture and refinement could give.

According to the then prevalent custom, she was married to Ramkrishna at the age of six. The match was brought about by the boy's parents. Ramkrishna (later called Ramkrishna Paramhans) was at this time deeply absorbed in spiritual activities at Dakshineshwar. He was a priest at the Kali temple. Ramkrishna had attained the stage of a spiritual 'sadhak' when everyone thought he was mad as he would occasionally shout as if in distress, 'Mother, O Mother Kali'. It was felt that if he was married, he would show greater interest towards family life. The search for a suitable girl commenced. Ramkrishna told them, "Why are you looking all over. The girl is at Jayramvati and her father's name is Ramchandra Mukhopadhyaya. That girl is destined to be my wife." After his marriage Ramkrishna Paramhans, remained at his village Kamarpukur for nearly nineteen months. In December 1860, when Sharada Devi was just seven years old, Ramkrishna went to bring her home as was the custom in the community. When he came to live at Dakshineshwar, Sharada Devi returned to her parents. When Ramkrishna returned to Kamarpukur, Sharada Devi was fourteen. She came back to her husband's house and remained there for some time. Ramkrishna Paramhans treated her with extreme kindness and apart from acquainting her in household duties, he also commenced her spiritual training. Sharada Devi had become of age and understood what marriage really meant. She liked to live with her husband, but she soon found that her husband was flawless as a man and his leanings were towards God and not towards the material side of the world. Ramkrishna may behave as any other normal being, but she realised his spiritual greatness. Recalling those early days, Mata Sharada Devi in later years remarked, "I recall with joy those early days. I felt as if a whole vessel of nectar had been placed at my disposal."

Sharada Devi was now eighteen and thought of the days when as a fourteen year old girl she had spent some of the happiest moments of her life in the company of her husband. She was sure that he would send for her and could not erase her memory from his mind. But she could not confide her thoughts to any other person and in order to keep herself busy she devoted more time to helping her mother. Stories about the mad behaviour of her husband reached her. Thus neighbours sympathised with Shyam Sundari Devi, Sharada's mother. She, therefore, decided to see things for herself and persuaded her father to take her to Dakshineshwar where her husband lived. The father agreed. Some of the intervening distance she covered in a palanquin and the remaining journey was covered on foot. Not being used to so much exertion, Sharada Devi fell ill and had fever. They stopped in a Dharamshala. Let us hear the further story in Sharada Devi's own words:

"I had high temperature and I was lying almost unconscious and had no knowledge about my surroundings. I thought I had seen a lady sitting by my side. She was dark in complexion, but she was so beautiful that I have seen no other woman as beautiful. She pressed my body and head. All my pain was fast disappearing, because her touch was so soothing and comforting. 'Where have you come from?' I asked. 'From Dakshineshwar', came the soft but assuring reply. 'Dakshineshwar! Why I am also going there to meet my husband.' 'Yes, I know. He is there and I have kept him there for your sake. You will surely meet him.' 'But then, who are you?' queried Sharada Devi. 'I am your sister.' And the vision vanished." The second day Sharada Devi had no fever and she commenced the journey on foot. On reaching Dakshineshwar, Sharada Devi met Ramkrishna Paramhans. He treated her with great care and consideration. "I am glad you have come", said the husband. A mattress was soon spread for Sharada Devi to take rest and arrangements were made for her medical care.

Sharada Devi remained at Dakshineshwar till 1885. She had found out that her husband kept awake at night, lost in deep meditation. He was always lost in thoughts about God

and he had been blessed with divine grace. Whenever there was any spiritual discourse, Ramkrishna would go into a trance. This is how she has described her stay at Dakshineshwar:

"It is not possible for me to describe the divine condition of my husband. In moments of ecstasy, he would laugh and at times cry or go into a trance. Sometimes this condition remained for a full night. I would shiver with fright and wait for the morning. One night, the trance continued for very long time than usual and I sent for Hriday (Ramkrishna's nephew). He came and repeatedly uttered God's name in my husband's ears. My Master then opened his eyes and understood my state of mind. He then told me which Mantra to recite on various occasions. This gave me great relief. My fears were allayed when I understood which Mantras to recite. Not knowing when he would go into a trance, sometimes I kept awake whole night. He understood all this and then asked me to sleep in the shed, so that I could sleep peacefully." This place was afterwards given to Ramkrishna's old mother, who spent her time along with her daughter-in-law.

Ramkrishna Paramhans was now thirty-five. He was at the peak of his spiritual Sadhana. He had realised the basic truths of all religions and understood that they were all identical and the difference lay in interpretations only. As Sharada Devi came of age, her husband prayed to the World-Mother to rid her of all sensuousness and feelings of sex. She should remain pure and virtuous. When she came to Dakshineshwar for the first time, he asked her, "Have you come to entangle me in the web of family life?" "No. My Master. But I wish to be your companion in your quest for truth." At this point of time Ramkrishna made preparations for what is called 'Shodash Puja', i.e. formal worship of a sixteen year old maiden. Sharada Devi was ceremoniously seated on a high pedestal meant for World-Mother and worship was offered to her. Ramkrishna Paramhans made the following prayer to the Mother:

"O Mother, exalted Virgin, All-powerful, O eternally Beautiful, shower your blessings."

"Open the doors leading to complete realisation. Bless this woman to be free from all sins. Make her body and mind pure; appear to us in her form and through her whatever is holy and good, do the same."

Sharada Devi was in a semi-conscious state. After the puja, she went into a trance. She realised the identity of the One worshipped and the One who worshipped. Ramkrishna had reached a supra-mental state of consciousness. He remained in that condition till mid-night. When he got out of that state, he prayed to the World-Mother, who had manifested Herself through Sharada Devi. After this 'Shodashi Puja' Sharada Devi acted like a partner in all undertakings of Ramkrishna Paramhans. To both of them, the other person looked like the World-Mother and they had both become divine in that sense. Their mutual relationship also acquired that divinity and they were no more husband or wife in the worldly sense. Hindu wives are told to take their husbands as Gods. But Sharada Devi never took that attitude. This is what she says:

"While at Dakshineshwar, I used to get up at three O'clock in the morning and sat for meditation. Once while sitting on the steps of the hall, where I lived, I chanted the Mantra given to me by Paramhans. All was quiet. Ramkrishna passed near me, but I was not aware of his movement. Normally I heard the sound of his wooden slippers whenever he walked. But that particular night, I was completely unaware of anything and when my saree was blown away by the morning breeze, I still remained unaware. Yogen (Ramkrishna's disciple) must have passed by and must have noticed me in that state."

Ramkrishna Paramhans and Sharada Devi were really great in the spiritual sense. Ramkrishna Paramhans died in 1886. Sharada Devi bemoaned his loss by saying, "O World-Mother, why have you forsaken me." She beheld the Mother's love and grace in the form of her husband. Once while massaging the feet of her lord she asked him, "What is your relationship towards me?" Ramkrishna Paramhans replied, "My mother who gave birth to this human body and you both

live in that shed. For me you both are identical." Ramkrishna Paramhans knew that his work would be carried on by Sharada Devi after him and so he had taught her the manner of initiating a person and to guide the needy in their spiritual quest. Sharada Devi was fully aware of responsibilities in this direction and carried on the work of her preceptor in an exemplary manner. She was now addressed as 'Sharada Ma' by her followers.

Sharada Ma came to Jayaramvati in 1873 in the month of October and stayed there for some months. Her father died in March 1874. She comforted her mother in this calamity and then returned to Dakshineshwar in April 1874 where Ramkrishna Paramhans was unwell and needed nursing. As soon as he felt slightly better, she returned to Jayaramvati in 1875. She herself was unwell. Ramkrishna Paramhans was worried on her account. She was a chronic patient of dysentery. After some medication she got better. The second time she fell sick was when there were stones in her kidney. She recovered from this and returned to Dakshineshwar in January 1877. During this period, Chandra Devi, mother of Ramkrishna Paramhans died. She was continuously making trips between Jayaramvati and Dakshineshwar. Once along with her companions, she was way-laid by dacoits. But she maintained her cool and spoke to her captors in an undaunted manner explaining that they had missed the road. The captors were greatly impressed and provided an escort to her upto Tarakchshwar.

Ramkrishna Paramhans developed cancer of the throat. He was shifted to hospital in Shampukur in September 1885. Sharada Ma faithfully nursed him. Finding no improvement in his condition, she undertook fast for two days and continued to pray. At night, she heard a voice, "Who is husband? Who is wife? There is no meaning in this worldly relationship. Do not try to destroy yourself by fasting and refusing food." Ramkrishna Paramhans died on 16th August 1886. On his demise, she began to divest herself of all the ornaments that she was wearing, when her husband seemed to materialise before her and said, "What are you doing? There is no death. I have only passed from

one region to another." This gave Sharada Ma much comfort and solace.

Two weeks after the demise of Ramkrishna Paramhans, Sharada Ma set on a journey to places in northern India. Along with her followers, she left Calcutta on 30th August 1886. She was accompanied by Lakshmi Devi, Ramkrishna's niece, Golap-Ma, Swami Yoganand, Swami Abhedanand and Swami Adbhutanand, all inmates of the Ashram and Mahendranath Gupt and his wife. They stopped at Varanasi and had darshan of the famous Vishwanath Temple. From there the party went to Ayodhya. During the train journey, she had a vision of Paramhans, who reminded her to keep safely the gold talisman that he had given her while initiating her with a divine mantra. When she reached Vrindavan, she thought of her lord and cried for him. Again the Master appeared and told her not to cry, because he was always by her side and had gone nowhere else. Only he had changed the place. In Vrindavan, the party stayed with Kaal Babu. Sharada Ma then commenced her role as a teacher and began to initiate people into Yoga. She practised 'Nirvikalp Yoga' and became an adept in it. She continued to receive guidance from her lord, even though he lived in a different region. Under his instructions, she initiated Yogen. The party returned to Calcutta in August 1887.

On her return to Calcutta, Sharada Ma went to Kamarpukur accompanied by Swami Yoganand and Golap-Ma. Kamarpukur was the birth place of her Master and as such was a sacred place. While at Kamarpukur, Sharada Ma was the victim of continued harassment and criticism. She was widow and yet she wore bangles and a red-bordered saree, which were all taboo for widows those days. She thought for a moment to take off the bangles, but her lord appeared before her and asked her not to remove bangles, "Gaurmani will come in the afternoon and explain the truth." And so Gaurmani came and told her the real truth and the deathless form of her husband. She spent her days in Kamarpukur in extreme poverty. With no attendants, she had to do marketting herself. Sometimes there was just no money and she could not afford to buy salt to be added to

the plate of rice. Her mother at Jayramvati heard of this and called her to live with her. But she did not stay long here and returned to Kamarpukur. She often wondered how her future life was going to be. She had no son on whom she could depend in her old age. The Master once again appeared and said, "Why are you pining for a son. You shall have many sons who will address you as mother. Look to them." Sharada Ma was convinced that the Master had different plans for her and her work had been assigned.

From 1888 onwards, there was a turn in her life. Shri Shardanand, her lord's disciple, constructed a house for her, called 'Mother's Home'. She observed the 'Panch Tapa' in 1893. During this 'tapa' a pledge is taken to spend time in meditation and prayer. Four fires are lighted in the four directions and the fifth source is Sun itself. Sharada Ma had no difficulty in fulfilling her obligations during this period. She made many rapid spiritual advances after this. She would have 'out-of-the body' experiences on many occasions. Once she thought that her consciousness had left the physical body and travelled far away where she found her Master also in the company of many saints. Her Master treated her very kindly and assured her of all moral and spiritual help. When the time came to return to the earth, she noticed her earthly tabernacle and was sorry to re-enter the same, because the world she had left behind was far more beautiful.

All recognised her spiritual supremacy and devotees began to visit her to receive guidance in spiritual matters. Sharada Devi's mother Shyam Sundari Devi died in 1906. Sharada Devi was the eldest in the family. She had four younger brothers. The youngest brother Abhaycharan had qualified as a medical practitioner, but he died in 1899. He was married and before his death he had left his wife in charge of his eldest sister, whose name was Radharani. She gave birth to a girl posthumously. Radharani, addressed as Radhu, became mentally deranged. Sharada Ma had to look after her and her daughter. She never grudged or complained and considered all the trouble she faced as trials for her. Sharada Ma was fully aware that she was getting tied up

more and more in bondages, but the Master again appeared before her and asked her to perform duties and discharge obligations without any complaints.

In the Ramkrishna Ashram, Sharadā Ma was held in great esteem like the departed Master. Sharada Ma had become one with her Master and was determined to carry on with his work. She was the first to be initiated by the Parmahans and was his first disciple. She fully realised what an onerous job it was to give 'Deeksha' or 'Guru Mantra'. This is what she has said in this connection:

"Through the Guru-mantra, the powers of the Guru are transferred to the initiated. The Guru has to transfer to himself all the sins of his disciple. He has to undergo suffering also on this account. To be a teacher is a very difficult job indeed. Some disciples progress very well, but some fail and drop out. It is all a result of one's past Karma."

Her attitude towards her followers was always like a mother. She knew that while giving initiation, she was going to have all their sins to herself. But she never demurred. Once Premanand, a close disciple of the Master remarked, "The poison we cannot dare to take, we send to Sharada Ma, which she gladly accepts and all is consumed by her." Whenever she was in Calcutta, devotees in thousands visited her and placed their heads on her feet seeking her blessings. Sometimes her feet would smart and then she would wash them with Ganges water. This practice alleviated her pain.

There was no end to Sharada Ma's hospitality. No one was returned unless fed. Sometimes, to escape the ordeal at Calcutta, she would go to Jayaramvati. But devotees thronged there also to seek her blessings. There are instances when due to her intervention many erring individuals were reformed.

In 1888, she undertook a second trip to Gaya, along with Swami Advaitanand. She performed the Shraddha ceremony of Ramkrishna Paramhans' mother. She also visited Bodh

Gaya, the place where Lord Buddha had got enlightenment. She also visited Jagannath Puri.

In 1894, Sharada Ma visited Varanasi and Vrindavan for a second time. A second trip to Puri was undertaken in 1901, and she went to Rameshwaram in 1910. On her return, she spent nearly a month in Madras where she initiated many persons. She felt extremely happy at meeting many women who were highly educated. At Madurai, she visited the famous temple of the World-Mother. After spending two days at Puri, she returned to Calcutta in April 1911. In November 1912, she visited Varanasi once again and remained there for some two and half months. She met Tota Puri, Guru of Paramhans and Chamlal Puri, his co-disciple. She came to live in *Matri-Griha* or 'Mother's Home' in 1909, where the Master's disciples lived. In 1919, she went to Jayaramvati and remained there for nearly a year. During the last three months of her stay her health declined and she was a victim of 'Kala-Azar', a peculiar illness of the tropical regions. Swami Sharadanand took her to Calcutta in February 1920. She remained in that condition for nearly five months and was reduced to a mere skeleton of her former self.

She became aware of her approaching end, but she continued worship of her lord. Some of the inmates of the Ashram including a lady cried at the thought of death. But Sharada Ma said, "Why are you crying my child? You have been privileged to have *darshan* of Paramhans. But let me give you last advice. If you desire peace of mind, stop finding fault with others. Look at your own faults and shortcomings. All are yours. There is no one stranger or the 'other person'. The entire world and its people are yours." This was her last message to the world. During the last three days she never exchanged a word with anyone. Once she sent for Swami Sharadanand and said, "Sharada, I am now leaving. Golap Ma, Yogen and others are here. Look after them." She left her mortal coils on 20th July 1920. Her body was taken to Belur Math where the last funeral rites were performed.

Sharada Ma was truly great. There was simplicity and no artificiality in her behaviour. Looking at her simple life,

without any ostentation or pompousness, one was forcibly remained of the old Rishis or sages who led a simple life in forests. Her teachings given in straight and simple language become very forceful. It would be useful to reproduce some of them:

1. If you do not have devotion towards God, He is not disturbed. The misfortune is entirely yours.
2. Mornings and evenings are suitable for meditation. During this time, the mind is calm.
3. Mantras purify the body. Man attains purity due to Naam-smaran. Always recite the Lord's name. It will give you peace.
5. Yes, action is necessary, but meditation and devotion are also necessary. If meditation is done, morning and evening, it helps to keep the mind at peace. It is like the control of a ship that governs direction.
6. An unmarried person does not have fetters that stand in the way of God-realisation. If he is drawn towards God, his progress is easier and faster.
9. Do not hurt others even by words. If truth is going to hurt, it should not be uttered. If you have cultivated impertinence, this is bound to show in your utterances. If you have no control over the language, you cannot control your thoughts. The Master often said, "If you ask a lame person, what is the cause of your deformity, even this will hurt him."
10. These formal spiritual debates. Leave this dry and futile exercise. That is not the way to reach or realise God.

Given below are some of the questions and answers by Sharada Ma:

- Q. 1. Ma, I have done so much puja and worship, but I have not received anything?

**Ans.** God's grace cannot be purchased with money, like you purchase vegetables or fish.

**Q.2.** Ma, I come to you so frequently. I feel that you are kind to me. Yet I feel that I have received nothing. How is this?

**Ans.** My child, imagine that you are a baby and are sleeping on a bed. Now you are picked up along with the bed and removed to some other place. When you wake up, will you become aware of the change. No. Only when you have discarded all laziness and are fully awake, then only you will understand what has happened.

**Q.3.** Ma, how to have a direct vision of God?

**Ans.** This is possible only when God's grace is there. But you must practise meditation and Japa. With this, all impurity of the mind disappears. You must practise Yama, Niyam. When a flower is crushed, only then its fragrance can be felt. Sandal-wood when rubbed massively gives its smell. The same about God-realisation. Constant meditation and thoughts about God, will give success and give you the desired realisation.

Readers who are interested in knowing more about Sharada Ma are advised to read two books, '*Great Women of India*' with a foreword by Dr S. Radhakrishna and published by Advait Ashram, Calcutta. The second book is '*Sri Sharada Devi: The Holy Mother*' published by Ramkrishna Math, Madras.

## SWAMI VIVEKANAND

One of the brightest stars that appeared on the spiritual horizon in recent times was Swami Vivekanand. He introduced India's culture and more particularly Hindu philosophy and thought, to the west. Let the story start at the beginning.

Sri Vishwanath Datta was an eminent practising lawyer in Calcutta High Court. His wife Bhuvaneshwari Devi was a devoted and pious lady. The couple had all the material comforts of life. They had daughters, but no son and quite naturally they pined for a male issue. Sri Vishwanath's father, Sri Durgacharan Datta was a great scholar in Sanskrit as well as Persian. After the birth of his son, Vishwanath, he took to ascetic life and left home. Bhuvaneshwari asked one of her relatives at Varanasi to visit the temple of Lord Vishwanath and offer oblations on her behalf and pray for a male offspring. Lord Shiva seems to have heard her prayers and Narendranath was born at Calcutta on 12th January, 1863, soon after sunrise. The day was Monday. The parents rejoiced at his birth. The boy was endearingly called Naren.

Naren was a precocious child, but was irrepressible. His manners were intractable and it is said that when he flew into a temper, his mother would often hold his head under running water, so as to quieten him, while she repeated the Lord's name into his ears. Naren bore a striking resemblance to his grand-father and some people thought that Durgacharan Datt had taken birth in the house. Naren was very hospitable to mendicants, Sadhus and monks and never turned them away till some food or other articles were offered to them. It is said that when he was a child, he would often behold a ball of light between his eyebrows, emitting various hues and bathing his whole body in white radiance. Watching this phenomenon, he would go to sleep. Naren imagined that this was the common experience of everyone, but he was surprised when one of his friends told him that he had no such experience. This vision remained with him till the end of his life. Years later, his Master Ramkrishna Paramhans

told him that the phenomenon indicated a rich spiritual past.

At the age of six, the boy was sent to school. He was however, withdrawn soon afterwards when it was found that he had picked up some obscene words from his class-mates. A private tutor was engaged. Naren carefully learnt Sanskrit grammar and learnt by heart many Shlokas. When at play, he was the leader of his group. At the age of seven, he entered a High School. He organised an amateur theatrical company and started a gymnastic club where fencing, wrestling, rowing and other manly sports were taught. Music was his favourite pastime and when he sang, he enthralled his listeners. He read serious books on history and literature. He was an avid reader and literally devoured magazines and newspapers. He loved the company of elderly people and would place his own views before them in a straight forward and intrepid manner. At sixteen, he passed Matriculation examination obtaining First Division and entered the Presidency College, Calcutta for higher studies. After a year he joined the Scottish College. Narendranath specialised in Philosophy and History. His father wanted him to go to England in order to qualify for the Indian Civil Service Examination. At this time Brahmo Samaj and its activities had caught hold of popular imagination. "Brahmoism", as the philosophy was called, was a peculiar amalgam of the Eastern and Western thought. Idol-worship was decried and Christian theology had made serious inroads into their activities. Narendranath attended a few of their meetings and put some searching questions. They only vexed the elder members of the Samaj, but left Narendranath completely disillusioned. He had met Devendranath Tagore and once asked him bluntly if he had seen God. Davendranath was embarrassed when thus confronted and said, "My boy, you have the eyes of a Yogi and should practise meditation." He put the same question to all learned persons whom he met, but was disappointed at their response. While at Scottish College, his teacher, Professor Hastic, during one of his lectures on Wordsworth's poem, 'The Excursion' where the poet describes his ecstatic experiences, remarked, "Such an

experience is the result of purity of mind and concentration. The phenomenon is rare indeed, particularly in these days. I have seen only one person who has experienced that blessed state of mind, and he is Sri Ramkrishna Paramhans of Dakshineshwar. You can understand for yourself if you go there."

Narendranath met the Master for the first time in November 1881 at the house of Surendranath Mitra, one of the Master's devotees. The Master seemed impressed by the young lad and asked him to come to Dakshineshwar. Naren obeyed him and at the Master's request sang a few songs. His first song was:

"Let us go back once more, O Mind, to our proper home;  
Here in this foreign land of earth  
Why should we wander aimlessly in stranger's disguise?"

When Naren had finished, Ramkrishna Paramhans suddenly grasped his hand and took him to the northern porch of the temple, much to his amazement. The Master said with tears in his eyes, "Ah, you have come so late. How unkind of you to keep me waiting for so long. My eyes are almost scared listening to the cheap talk of worldly people. Oh, how I have been yearning to unburden my mind to one who will understand my thoughts. I know you are the ancient sage Nara born on earth to remove the miseries of the world." The Master brought some sweets from another room and fed Naren with his own hands. Naren was quite perplexed and did not know whether he was dealing with a man in his senses or an insane person. When they returned to the room, Naren asked his favourite question, "Sir, have you seen God?" Without a moment's hesitation, pat came the reply. "Yes, I have seen God. I see Him as I see you here, only more clearly. God can be seen. One can talk to Him. But who cares for God? People shed torrents of tears for their wives, children, wealth and property, but who weeps for the vision of God. If one cries sincerely for God, one can surely see Him." Narendranath felt that the words were said truthfully, for the manner was so transparent and had emanated from the depths of an inner realisation. He returned to Calcutta

completely bewildered, but with a feeling which he never had earlier. The Master had bidden him to come alone the next time.

Narendranath's visit was extremely memorable. The Master drew near him, muttered some words and after fixing his eyes on him, placed his right foot on his body. At this touch, Narendranath felt as if the walls, the room, the temple, garden and the whole world was non-existent and there was a void all round. He wailed, "What are you doing? Let me live. I have my parents, who will be worried." The Master laughed and stroked his chest and remarked, "All right, everything will happen in due course." On his third visit, Narendranath maintained his cool and tried his strong will to remain unaffected by any hypnotic exercises that the Master might employ. The Master took him to the nearby garden and touched him. Narendranath lost consciousness. The Master asked him many questions while he was in that state, concerning his past life, his mission on earth and the period for which he had come to live. The Master tamed the rebellious spirit of his disciple.

From that moment, the spiritual lessons started. The Master's mystic touch transformed Narandranath, who was a near agnostic, into what he later on was transformed as Swami Vivekanand. During the first five or six years of his discipleship, the neophyte met the Master once or twice every week and often stayed with him for some days. In 1884, while he was preparing for his B.A. examination, Narendranath's father passed away. He had lived beyond his means. On his death the family found itself penniless. Even providing food for the family became a serious problem. Narendranath confided to his Master and asked him to pray to Mother Kali for alleviating their distress. He was directed to go to the shrine and pray for himself. But Narendra found that he could not pray for material things and ended in beseeching the Mother to give him light and spiritual guidance. This he did on three occasions and everytime he returned without asking for financial assistance. He then realised that his Master's will was operating in this peculiar way. "Once you are in the presence of living Divinity, how can you

ask for petty things?" Naren then asked the Master to do something for him. The Master said that he could not pray to the Mother and ask for such small things, but he gave his own blessings that the family would no more suffer for want of material things. All this made a deep impression on Naren and he prayed to Mother, "Break my chains, O Mother, and make me free." His own poverty made him realise the pitiful condition of his countrymen and he felt an intense sympathy for the needy and afflicted. He understood from the Master that true religion transcends all barriers of caste, colour and creed, because the same divine spark resides in all. God was immanent and transcended all such petty divisions.

In 1855, the Master showed signs of a mortal illness for the first time and Naren realised that he would not live long. One day he asked the Master to grant him the boon of remaining merged in Samadhi. And the Master said, "There is a state higher than that. To see the world alone without God is ignorance, 'Agyan'. To see God without the world is 'Gyan', but to see all things permeated by God is supreme wisdom or 'Vijnan'." The Master considered Naren as his spiritual successor. One day he called Naren and looking deeply into his eyes said, "Today, I have given you everything I possess. By this power, you will accomplish great things in the world."

On August 15, 1886, Ramkrishna entered into Mahasamadhi. To start a centre for the Master's teachings a house was rented in Baranagore (Varah-nagar), midway between Calcutta and Dakshineshwar. The place became the first headquarters of the monks of Ramkrishna Order. In the shrine room a copper vessel containing ashes of the Master was kept and worship was offered everyday. In 1889, Naren in the company of other disciples left on a holy pilgrimage with only a staff and a begging bowl. First he went to Banaras. One day he was pursued by a band of monkeys. Naren ran in utter fear seeking protection when a monk called him and said, "Don't run, face the brutes." Naren did so and looked defiantly at the monkeys, who soon fled away. This incident taught him to be courageous and not to run away. From Banaras the party went to Ayodhya, Lucknow,

Agra, Vrindavan and Haridwar. After visiting Ghazipur, the party returned to Calcutta to be at the bedside of Balaram Bose and Surendranath Mitra, disciples of Ramkrishna, who were lying seriously ill. Both of them passed away soon.

In 1890 Naren left again for visiting places vowing to himself not to return till he had gained light. He took leave of the divine mother Sharada Devi. During this journey, he covered whole of India. He was now called Swami and dressed up like an ascetic monk. He went to the snowy peaks of the Himalayas as also the sandy desert of Rajasthan. An incident occurred which is memorable. Narendra had taken Sanyas on Christmas eve in 1886 and assumed the monastic name of Swami Vivekanand. It was in this habitat that he visited Alwar, a tiny state in Rajasthan. The Maharaja welcomed him. He was fully western-oriented youth and asked Vivekanand, why was God worshipped in stone idols or statues. The state's Dewan was also there. Swami Vivekanand asked him to bring to him the oil painting of the late Maharaja, which was decorating the walls of the palace. When this was done and placed on the floor, Swamiji asked him whose painting it was. "Why, do not you see the likeness? It is of the late Highness, Maharaja's father." "Will you now stand on it and spit?" The Dewan hearing this shrank in horror and looked at the Raja expecting an explosion. But Swamiji calmly said, "It is only a piece of paper on which there is a painting, which resembles your father, but it is not your father. Now if this is the case, what is the harm in worshipping idols, if one perceives the likeness of God therein." The Maharaja understood and became his disciple.

Swami continued his peregrinations and visited many places seeing for himself the poverty and squalor for which the people suffered. He moved amongst the masses seeing for himself their pitiful condition. His one thought was, "How to help these teeming masses? How to help them, how to help them?" That was his constant refrain. The Maharaja of Khetri was drawn to him and he begged him to grant a son. At Poona the Swami met the great scholar and patriot, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and stayed with him. The Maharaja of Mysore also showed his keenness to promote his journey to

the west to propound Indian philosophy and Hindu religion. Swamiji visited Kanyakumari and then swam to the sea-girt rock, the last landmark of the country. There he sat in deep meditation. Swami Vivekanand has written about this incident as under:

"At Cape Camorin, sitting at Mother Kumari's temple on the last bit of Indian rock, I hit upon a plan. We are so many Sanyasins wandering about and teaching the people metaphysics—it is all madness. Did not our Master say, 'An empty stomach is no good for religion'. That these people are leading the life of brutes is simply due to ignorance. Suppose some dedicated Sanyasin, bent on doing good to others goes from village to village disseminating education and seeking in various ways to better the conditions of all, down to the chandals, through oral teaching and by means of maps, globes and such other accessories - can't they bring forth good in time? We, as a nation, have lost and that is the cause of all the mischief and misery in India. We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality and uplift the masses." Thus it was at Kanyakumari that the Swami dedicated himself to the service of the poor and down-trodden. It was here that he was transformed into a patriot-monk. It was here that an idea was born that he should visit America to spread the message of his Master and collect funds to start hospitals, educational institutions and other organisations devoted to the service of the teeming masses. The Raja of Ramnad suggested that the Swami should attend the Parliament of Religions to be held at Chicago. The idea was welcomed by all and his devotees started collecting funds for his journey. At Madras, many became his followers and started to collect money. The Maharaja of Khetri, who had been blessed with a son, considered this as a mark of Swami's spiritual blessings and considered his privilege to contribute handsomely to the journey expenses.

Swami Vivekanand set out from Bombay on 31st May 1891 for his historic journey to America. Swamiji was provided with adequate funds and comfortable first class berth. He travelled via China, Japan and during the course of his journey touched Colombo, Singapore, Hongkong.

Nagasaki, Osaka, Kyoto, Tokyo and Yokahama. On reaching Vancouver, he took a train to Chicago. He was lodged in one of the best hotels. The Parliament was to meet two months later and so he shifted to Boston, where the stay was cheaper. At Boston he became acquainted with Professor Wright of Harvard university, who helped Swamiji to get the necessary credentials for attending the conference. He was introduced to the Chairman of the Committee by Professor Wright in the following words, "Here is a man more learned than all our learned Professors put together." Railway ticket to Chicago was purchased by Professor Wright. The Swami had lost the address of the venue of the conference and he did not know where to spend the night. So he slept in an empty freight wagon. The next morning, Dr Barrows, President of the Parliament cordially welcomed him and arranged his lodging with other oriental delegates in a suitable hotel.

The Parliament opened at 10 a.m. on 11th September 1891. The delegates went to the rostrum and one by one read out their prepared speeches. Swami Vivekanand had no prepared speech and when his turn came he was full of trepidations. He said later, "My heart was fluttering and my tongue nearly dried up. I was so nervous that I could not venture to speak in the morning session." When he appeared on the rostrum Dr Barrows introduced him. Swami Vivekanand thought of his Master and bowed to Goddess Saraswati and the mighty words rolled out, "Sisters and Brothers of America." The audience was stunned at this manner of address and thousands stood up and clapped in applause and admiration. It took full two minutes before the tumult stopped. Swamiji thanked the Americans as the youngest of nations and offered greetings from India, the oldest of nations. The keynote of his address was universal brotherhood and tolerance. He quoted the following verse: "As different streams mingle in the sea, different paths, which men take through different tendencies, various though they may appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."

Swamiji's message to the Parliament had a universal theme and so all were impressed by this new approach. The whole town displayed his triumph in banners and

photographs. Swamiji addressed the Parliament atleast a dozen times. In the final session he said, "The Christian is not to become a Hindu, nor the Buddhist to become a Christian. Each must assimilate the spirit of others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth. If the Parliament has shown anything to the world, it is this: It has proved that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any Chruch in the world and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character." From obscurity, Swami Vivekanand lept into fame. His speeches were read with great interest. The Swami stayed in America for nearly three years after his Chicago address and continued to give addresses. He paid a short visit to England also and found that the response to his message there was also great and spontaneous. He met the great scholar Professor Max Muller and exchanged views with him. In America, he organised the Vedant Society of New York with the aim of preaching Vedant and applying the universal principle as basic to all religions. He wrote books on Raj-Yoga and Jnan Yoga. He gathered round him a number of ardent disciples wherever he went, the notable amongst them being Captain Sevier, his wife and Miss Margaret Noble, who later on came to be known as Sister Nivedita. Towards the end of 1896, he left for India.

The Swami along with his group reached Colombo on 15th January 1897 where a triumphant welcome awaited him. People all over were jubilant and rose as one man to welcome, because he had brought honour and glory to their country. At Madras he delivered five public lectures and issued a clarion call to his country to rise and discard lethargy. "Arise my countrymen! You have slept for long. Discard this slavish mentality and work hard to recapture the lost glory, the name and fame that was India." Vivckanand reached Calcutta on the 20th of February. A tumultuous welcome was accorded. He paid a touching tribute to his Master: "If there has been anything achieved by me, by thoughts, words or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped anyone in the world, I lay no claim to

it...I was His...If this nation wants to rise, take my word for it, it will have to rally round His name,"

Swami Vivekanand wanted to put Master's work on a sound footing and so he called a meeting of all the disciples and the Ram Krishna Mission was formed on 1st May 1897. The aims of the Mission were spiritual and humanitarian. As one of his biographers has said, "Of the Swami's numerous triumphs, one of the greatest was his conversion of the Gurubhais from the individualistic to the national idea of religious life in which public spirit and service to fellow men occupied a prominent place." The members of the Mission performed yeomen service when plague broke out in Calcutta. Relief work was organised by members of the Mission and help was given in a spirit of dedication and as an act of service to God.

As soon as the plague was controlled, Swami Vivekanand with his Western disciples left for Nainital and Almora. Later they went to Kashmir and then visited the holy shrine of Amarnath reaching there on 2nd August 1898. The visit was important. He joined the stream of other pilgrims, bathed in the river like any other ordinary devotee, "entered the cave dressed in a loin cloth only". There he had mystical experience of the majesty and glory of the Lord. He was greatly moved when he entered the famous shrine of the Lord of Snows. For many days afterwards, he spoke only about Shiva - Shiva the eternal monk lost in meditation amidst the snows of the Himalayas. Later on he remarked, "Ever since I went to Amarnath, Shiva Himself has entered into me. He will not leave me." After Amarnath, the Swami visited the holy shrine of Kashmir Bhawani Mata near Srinagar. It added to his spiritual experience.

On his return to Calcutta, Swamiji started the construction of Belur Math situated on the west bank of the Ganges, five miles away from Calcutta. In January 1899, the ascetics and monks moved to the new monastery. The Nivedita Girls' School had already been started. A magazine in Bengali 'Udbodhan' was also launched at this time. His disciples Captain Scvier and his wife built the Advait Ashram at

Mayavati near Almora in the Himalayas. An English monthly, 'Prabuddha Bharati' was also started. The work of the Monastery took up his energy and his health showed signs of decay. He was advised to go to America once again. On 20th June 1899, accompanied by Sister Nivedita, he set out on the voyage. Describing this journey and her experiences therein, the Sister wrote:

"From the beginning to the end, a vivid flow of stories went on. One never wondered when the intuition would come along with some ringing utterance of fresh truth." "Social life in the west is like a peal of laughter; but underneath it is a wail. It ends in a sob...wheras in India, it is sad and gloomy on the surface, but underneath are carelessness and merriment. The West had tried to conquer external nature and the East had tried to conquer internal nature. Now East and West must work hard in hand for the good of each other without destroying the special characteristics of each. The West has much to learn from the East and the East from the West. In fact the future must be shaped by a proper fusion of the two ideals. Then there will be neither East nor West, but one humanity."

The Swami set up a Shanti Ashram in Northern California and placed it under the charge of Swami Turiyanand and also another Vedant Centre at San Francisco. With all such physical work, the Swami became aware of his approaching end and he wrote to Miss Macdonald, "My boat is nearing the calm harbour from which it is never more to be driven out." He arrived in Paris on 1st August 1900 to participate in the Congress of the History of Religions. On his return he toured some of the European countries and then came to Turkey and then to Egypt. He had a premonition of Captain Sevier's death and therefore, rushed back to India and reached Belur Math on 9th December, 1900. On arrival he learnt of the Captain's death on 28th October. He came to Mayavati to console Mrs Sevier. On return to Belur Math, he stayed there for about seven weeks and then left on a tour of East Bengal and Assam. His mother went with him. He returned to Belur Math and relaxed there supervising gardening, cooking and such other mundane jobs. One day he arranged for food to

be served to the Santhal coolies who were working in the Math.

On 4th May 1902, he meditated from 8 to 11 in the morning. In the afternoon he went out for a walk and spent an hour in meditation. Thereafter he took two deep breaths and then passed out to merge with eternity. The Light that had shone and illumined not only India, but many other parts of the world also, was extinguished. Though this was not correct for the Swami had once said in London: "It may be that I shall find it good to get outside my body, to cast it off like a worn out garment. But I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere until the world shall know that it is one with God." Truly prophetic words. The Swami has inspired many and will continue to inspire the coming generations. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (of Pondicherry) have acknowledged their gratitude to the Swami for receiving spiritual inspiration and guidance from him. His writings and works have been monumental. Books on Yoga and other spiritual subjects are the sheet anchor of many aspirants. He was a powerful speaker, a learned writer and a great social and religious reformer. He declared, "Each soul is a potential divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work or worship or psychic control or philosophy - by one or more or all of them and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, dogmas, rituals, books, temples or forms are but secondary details..."

Here is another such piece:

"What India needed was practical Vedant, combined with the practical body of Islam, the heart of Buddha... I do not believe in a God or religion that cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth."

His clarion call to his countrymen went out in the following words:

"The highest truth is this. God is present in all beings. They are His multiple forms. There is no other God to see. It is man-making religion that we want... Give up these

weakening mysticisms and be strong. For the next fifty years, let all other Gods disappear from our minds. This is the only God that is awake... Our own race, Everywhere His hands, everywhere His feet, everywhere His eyes. He covers everything... The first of all worships is the worship of those all around us. He alone serves God, who serves all other beings."

It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own, but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude. Such a person was Swami Vivekanand. He found that his countrymen were poor, famished and in chains and he gave ringing calls, "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached."

## CHAITANYA MAHA PRABHU

Jagannath Mishra and his wife Shachi Devi originally belonged to Sylhet district in East Bengal, but they moved down to Nadia (then known as NabdwEEP). They had two sons, Bishwarup and Bishambhar. These were the only two sons, but in between there were eight daughters. Bishambhar (later on called Nimai) was born on the full-moon day in the month of Phalgun corresponding to year 1485 A.D. He was very handsome looking and very fair in complexion.

The eldest boy, Bishwarup (later known as Nityanand) left the house at an early age to become a monk, much to the grief of the mother. Nimai from his very childhood was a precocious child and developed a highly egoistic and proud temperament towards any one who disagreed with him, young or old. While his intellectual propensities were fully recognised, his arrogance at times became intolerable. When he was eighteen, he was married to Laxmi Devi and thereafter commenced his life as a house-holder. He had collected round him many boys of his age, who felt awed at his superior manners and bearing. His mother called him 'Nimai' (meaning short-lived), because she feared that he would also disappear like his elder brother. But soon he came to be addressed as Nimai Pandit, because of his erudition. He was fierce in his reasoning and would argue with any one with such a telling conviction that no one could beat him. Even at home at times he proved to be incorrigible. If there was any short-coming in preparing the tray loaded with flowers and other articles used in worship, he would lose his temper and throw the tray into the courtyard, much to the grief of his mother. It was his wont to belittle his class-mates, if they made any mistakes. Once one of his class-mates, who was the son of a local Vaidya or medical practitioner committed some small error and was taunted with the insulting remarks, "You should have remained at home feeling the pulse of your patients instead of wasting your time in studies here."

But with all these ideoSynchronacies, his circle of followers gradually increased, which only served to inflate his ego. He

was unequalled in his debating skill and he always scored over his opponents. Once a great and renowned scholar, Acharya Keshab Dev came to Nabdweep. He prided himself in the notion that no one was superior to him or more knowledgeable and as such none could beat him in arguments. Nabdweep was famous as a great centre of learning. Many visited the place for proving their superiority by contending in debates on spiritual matters. Gatherings of Pandits and scholars were often held for this purpose. At one such meeting Acharya Keshab Dev engaged Nimai Pandit into a discussion, thereby to show to all that he was more learned than Nimai Pandit. Nimai asked him to compose a poem about Mother Ganges on whose banks the debate was being held. Acharya Keshab Dev did so. Nimai Pandit pointed many errors in his composition. His rejoinder was accepted, and Keshab Dev immediately admitted his mistakes and withdrew from the gathering and retired to his home in Kashmere, humbled but wiser.

Once when Nimai Pandit was away from Nabdweep, his wife Lakshmi died of snake-bite. This afflicted Nimai Pandit very much. He now devoted more time in teaching his students. On his mother's insistence, Nimai Pandit married again. This time it was a beautiful girl, named Vishnupriya. Along with his vanity which Nimai Pandit had developed, he was at the same time a kind-hearted person. Once he was busy writing a book, called 'Panchhi Teeka' which became famous in no time. He began writing another book on legal jurisprudence. At the same time there was another scholar, Pandit Raghunath, who was also writing a book on a similar subject. While they were travelling in a boat crossing a river, Pandit Raghunath requested Nimai Pandit to show him his work. Nimai Pandit immediately pulled out sheets of paper and handed them over to the Pandit, who began to cry after he had read a few pages. "What has happened?" wondered Nimai Pandit. He was pained to hear that Pandit Raghunath would write no more, since his own work could not stand comparison with the superb book being written by Nimai Pandit. Nimai immediately threw his own work into the river and assured Pandit Raghunath that he could go ahead with his book. Such was his magnanimity.

Ishwarpuri, a disciple of the then famous Vaishnavite Madhavpuri, visited Nabdweep. Nimai Pandit heard from him stories of the divine Leela of Lord Krishna. He was so enraptured after having listened to him that from that moment a new chapter was opened in his life. He was no longer the intrepid debater or fierce crusader, but soaked in the Bhakti of Lord Krishna. He now remained absorbed in his meditation about the Lord. The entire creation to him seemed to be an immanation of the cosmic energy, which was pulsating with Krishna's glory and power. He always murmured to himself, "Oh, Krishna, Krishna, you are my life, my breath. Never forsake me." During this period he made a journey to Gaya to pay oblations to his mane in the company of Ishwarpuri. After visiting the temples he was a completely changed person. His mother Shachi Devi saw this change in him and was greatly upset. Nimai Pandit continued to speak to his students and listeners, "You are all children of Krishna. There is no difference. The outward form may vary, but the energy within all is Krishna's. This river, trees, this Ashram are all His manifestations. All the Darshan Shastras, Mimansa, Upnishads are His various forms. Grasp this fundamental truth."

Gradual but definite changes were taking place in Nimai Pandit. His face beamed with a spiritual radiance. His approach towards life and its manifold problems was no more merely intellectual. His egoism had been replaced by altruism. He was soaked in constant thoughts of Krishna. He would say, "When I stand up to teach, a child of the complexion of clouds appears before me. He plays on a flute and in the music that fills the air, I am lost and think of nothing else." Towards his Lord, he had become devotional as well as emotional. Sometimes he would begin to cry as the separation from his beloved Lord was unbearable to him. On such occasions, his eyes would become wells of tears and it took him quite some time to get out of this condition. In his Ashram many Vaishnavites would collect, representing many shades of opinions. Exchange of ideas on spiritual matters would take place. There were Shriniwas, Mukund Dutt, Musleem Bhakta Haridas, Budhimantkhan Pundalik and Shridhar besides many other well known figures. His elder

brother, Bishwarup who had taken the monastic name Nityanand joined him, and the two brothers, popularly addressed as Nimai-Nitai combine, became very popular. In fact in subsequent years, Nimai Pandit, who had then become Gaurang Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, was considered as Krishna incarnate and Nityanand as the brother Balram, elder brother of Krishna. But more of it later.

There were his admirers as well as detractors, who indulged in ceaseless maligning. Two persons named Jagai (Jagannath) and Madhai (Madhav) were appointed as Police Officers of Nabdweep. They were wicked and harassed innocent people at times without any rhyme or reason. They decided to punish the Nimai-Nitai combine. Once while Nitai was crossing a road, the two wicked officials threw a broken earthern pot which hit Nitai on the head. That resulted in profuse bleeding. As soon as Nimai came to know about this, he ran to his brother. One of the two officials Jagai was somewhat kind hearted and even before the arrival of Nimai Pandit had rendered first-aid. So Nimai thanked him for his kindness. By the mere touch of Nimai, Jagai was transformed into a noble and kind person. Soon Madhai also joined and fell at the saint's feet and craved pardon for his evil doings.

Nimai Pandit now began to consider the possibility of his taking Sanyas or renunciation. But this must be permitted by his mother and his wife Lakshmi. The mother was heart-broken when she heard about this. The eldest son was already lost to her and now the second one was also going the same way. How could she permit him? He was all that was left to her. He was her only support since she was widowed. "Tell me, Nimai", she cried, "how do you expect me to agree to your proposal?" But Nimai politely told his mother, "Ma, what can I do. I do not have a moment's peace. My heart yearns for Krishna. He is calling me to fulfil my obligations to the world. They are all waiting for me." The mother realised that her son had a purpose in life which could not be realised at home. She could not bind him any more and so decided to release him from all house-hold obligations. In a resigned manner, she gave him the desired permission.

Nimai's wife Lakshmi, who was at her parent's house heard about her husband's intentions and came rushing. When she arrived, Nimai Pandit was asleep. She quickly entered the room and looking at her husband felt that it was useless to make any efforts to detain him. There was a such spiritual reliance on his face and person, that she felt almost blind. She decided there and then not to come in the way of her husband's decision to renounce the world. She must make that sacrifice. She was young and beautiful, but realised that her husband had come to rescue the world and detaining him for her sake, would be an act of sin. She quietly touched her husband's feet. When he sat up and looked surprised to find his wife at the bedside, she informed him in a very polite manner that he was free to carry out his intentions and she would not stand in his way.

Thus Nimai Pandit got his mother's and wife's permission to embrace a 'Sanyasi's' life. After placing his head on his mother's feet, Nimai Pandit left the house and set up an Ashram across the river belonging to Keshav Bharti. There he underwent formal ceremony of initiation and changed his clothes according to the changed circumstances. He was given fresh name also. He was now called, Chaitanya Maha Prabhu. Since he was of an extremely fair complexion, his complete name was "Gowrang (fair complexioned) Chaitanya Maha Prabhu". He addressed meetings now under this new title and name.

He set out on a pilgrimage of the holy places. Many joined him on the journey. He went to South and amongst other places visited Pandharpur, the famous place where there is the temple of Lord Vitthal. After visiting many other places, where he drew huge crowds who listened to his Bhajans sung with complete abandon and devotion. He came to Punc. There also he drew huge crowds in the performance of Krishna Sankirtan. His famous lines of the Bhajan are:

**"Shri Hari Bol, Hari Hari Bol**

**Govind Madhav Sri Hari Bol."**

He carried a pair of cymbals and a stringed instrument and danced joyfully while singing the Bhajans. The listeners were electrified by this and joined him whole heartedly. He then returned to Nabdweep and fell at the feet of his aged mother, who was overjoyed to meet him. Chaitanya Maha Prabhu now had one desire. He wanted to visit Vrindavan, where the Lord had spent his early days of childhood and sport. He accordingly left Nabdweep and visited Vrindavan, Mathura, Kashi and Prayag. Wherever he went, his fame had already preceded him. After these peregrinations of the holy places, Chaitanya Maha Prabhu returned and eventually passed the last eighteen years of his life at Jagannath Puri.

His Keertans and Bhajans continued with added fervour as each day passed. He made no distinction of caste or colour and asked all present to partake of Prasad together. There could be no touchables or untouchables. He had spent the first twenty-four years of his life at Nabdweep, another six to eight years in visiting holy places of the country and remained at Puri for the remaining eighteen years of his earthly life. Puri, which was already considered a sacred place, was further sanctified by his presence. One can feel the holy effects even today. When his end on this planet was approaching, it is said, that he shut himself in the Puri temple and locked the doors from inside. The next morning his dead body was found. His spirit had merged with the spirit of Krishna and there was to be no separation now. It is also said that he ended his life by drowning in the nearby sea. Whatever the truth, Gourang Chaitanya Maha Prabhu has left an indelible mark behind him. He died in Saka 1455 corresponding to year 1533 A.D.

### **Chaitanya Maha Prabhu's philosophy:**

Chaitanya Maha Prabhu has not left any writings behind him. Some of his songs have however, been compiled by his followers. But a gist of his doctrines and teachings can be summed up by reproducing para 68 and 69 of the famous book by the eminent orientalist, Sir R.G. Bhankarkar, 'Vaishnavism Saivism And Other Minor Religious Systems':

"68. Krishna is the highest God and is so beautiful that he excites love for himself even in the heart of the God of love and is enamoured of himself. His Parabrahmashakti (power) pervades the universe and assumes a corporal form by his wonder-creating powers (Mayashakti), though he is the soul of all. He possesses a self-multiplying power (Vilas shakti) which is of two kinds. By one of these, in sporting with the cowherdresses, he became as many Krishnas as were sufficient to give one to every two of them (Prabhavavilas). By the other self-multiplying power (Vaibhavavilas) he assumes the forms of the four Vyuhas or forms of Vasudeva, representing intelligence, Samkarshan, consciousness, Pradyumna the love and Anirudh sportiveness. Here it will be seen that the functions of the four Vyuhas have been changed... This change is in consonance with a system of which love and sport form the distinguishing characteristics... The sports of Krishna go on for ever like the rising and setting of the sun... Krishna has three powers: the internal which is intelligence; the external which generates appearances and the differentiated which forms the Jiva or individual soul. His chief power is that which creates dilatations of the heart, or joy. This appears to be the power of love. When this love becomes settled in the heart of the devotees, it constitutes Mahabhava, or the best feeling. When love attains to the highest pitch, it constitutes itself into Radha, who is the most loveable of all and full of all qualities. She was the object of the highest love for Krishna and being idealised as love, some of the agreeable feelings of the heart are considered her ornaments. The sports of the cowherdresses were due to simple love (prama), and this was that Uddhava and other devotees sought to attain. The Supreme Soul (Paramatman) is boundless and is full of intelligence itself. The individual soul is an atom having intelligence itself. They are necessarily connected together and this connection can never be destroyed. Krishna is the support (Asraya) and Jiva rests on him (Asrita). The relation between the two is identity as well as difference. Thus the Vedantic theory of Chaitanya's system is the same as that of Nimbarka. As the bee is distinct from the honey and hovers about it and when it drinks it is full of it i.e. is one with it, so the individual soul is at first

distinct from the Supreme Soul, seeks the Supreme Soul consistantly and continuously and, when through love he is full of the Supreme Soul, he becomes unconscious of his individual existence and becomes as it were, absorbed in him. Herein is described the ecstatic condition in which the individual soul becomes one with God, though they are really distinct. Krishna is the lord of the power of delusion, or ignorance (Maya), and Jiva is the slave of it. When the latter cuts off its shackles, he distinctly sees his own nature and his true relation to God. Krishna is to be approached and attained by Bhakti alone."

69. "Krishna Chaitanya, Nityanand and Adwaitanand are called the three Prabhus or masters of the sect..."

"The sectarian marks worn by the followers of Chaitanya are two white perpendicular lines on the forehead joined together at the bridge of the nose and a line continued up to the tip of the nose. They also use necklaces of three strings of Tulsi beads and a rosary of the same, as a help in muttering Hari's name."

The author has taken the liberty of reproducing verbatim extracts from the famous book, because he found it impossible to improve on them. The doctrines and philosophy quoted above remind one of the Sufi cult where the Lord is the beloved and the devotee. In fact one finds that similar currents of Bhakti ran through the length and breadth of the country as many devotees viz. Vallabhacharya, Surdas and some others adored Lord Krishna in more or less the same way.

Chaitanya Maha prabhu was truly a great devotee of the Lord. As to what is meant when he is described as an Avatar of Lord Krishna Himself is difficult to explain and all that can be said is that the Lord's spirit manifested itself to the world through this particular devotee.

Chaitanya's philosophy reminds us of the teachings of the Lord as imparted to Arjun on the battlefield. Here given below are some free-hand renderings of the Bhakti philosophy of Chaitanya through his songs:

"Krishna's name if uttered even once  
 will wash off all sins and still enkindle  
 deep devotion in one's heart,  
 Love of Krishna is the crown of all religion.  
 Neither Yoga, nor knowledge, nor piety,  
 nor study, nor austerity, nor renunciation  
 will ever captivate Lord Sri Krishna  
 as devotion to him does.

Love for Shri Krishna is generated by:

- (i) Even a little of association with Sadhus.
- (ii) Listening to the sacred Bhagwat.
- (iii) Krishna Naam Samkirtan.
- (iv) Dwelling in Mathura (on thoughts of God).
- (v) Adoration of his image.

There is nothing higher and more meritorious  
 than the Sankirtan Yajna i.e. the chorus-singing  
 of the Lord's name."

Bhakti or devotion is of nine types, and is called Navadha Bhakti:

*"Shravanam Keertanam Vishnu-Smaranam Padsevanam  
 Vandanaṁ Archanam Dasyam Sakhyam Atma Nivedanam."*

<i>Shravanam</i>	Listening to Lord's glory.
<i>Keertanam</i>	Doing Bhajans and narrating stories of Lord's glory.
<i>Smaranam</i>	Always thinking and reminding oneself of Lord's Name.
<i>Padsevanam</i>	Worshipping at the Lord's feet.
<i>Vandanaṁ</i>	Singing praises of Lord's glory and grace.
<i>Archanam</i>	Performing solicitous prayers of the Lord.
<i>Dasyam</i>	Being a factotum of the Lord.

*Sakhyam* Bhakti in the form of a companion.  
*Atma-Nivedanam* Offering oneself as an humble devotee.

Chaitanya Maha Prabhu was a Krishna devotee of the highest order and had imbibed in himself all the nine forms of Bhakti.

## MATA ANANDAMOYEE

Nirmala, later known as Mata Anandamoyee, was born on April 30, 1896 in a noble and pious Brahmin family in a village, Vidyakut (Kheora) in district Tripura. Her father's name was Bipin Behari Bhattacharya and mother's Makshada Sundara Devi. Bipin Behari was later on known by his monastic name Muktanand Giri. The parents brought up their daughter in a very simple but affectionate manner. When twelve, she was married to Ramani Mohan Chakraborty of village Atpara in Vikrampur, Dhaka. It is said that even when she was a house-holder, she often went into trance which was mostly taken as bouts of hysterical fits. Relatives used to criticise her for those attacks. Though her husband was inclined to agree with them in the beginning, he soon realised and accepted the divinity resident in his wife. While they lived at Bajitpur, Nirmala often went into a trance-like meditation. The husband accepted her as 'Devi' or highly evolved soul and spoke in respectful terms to her relatives and friends. Nirmala often participated in Hari-keertans along with other devotees and soon drew huge crowds around her. At this time she came to be popularly called Manush-Kali or Kali in human form.

Ramani Mohan Chakraborty felt puzzled by her strange behaviour and realised that a house-holder's life was not meant for his wife. So he advised her to get formally initiated by a Guru. Nirmala accepted this suggestion and began preparations for her initiation. An alter was constructed. She used to sit on it doing severe austerities and chanted the desired hymns in Sanskrit and thus accomplished initiation on her own. After sometime she initiated her husband also and gave him the monastic name of Bholanath. During a visit to Siddheshwari Kali temple in Dhaka, Nirmala sat within the precincts in her characteristic pose in 'Padmasana' and was lost in meditation. Such joy and ecstasy radiated from her face that her disciple Jyotish Chandra Roy, her 'spiritual son', who saw her was moved and addressed her as 'Sri Anandamoyee Ma' which became her popular name.

Mata Anandamoyee, thereafter was the centre of popular attention. People flocked to see and hear her spiritual discourses. She spoke in a divine manner to all, both Hindus and Muslims, for religion made no difference to her. For her 'namaz' and 'Keertan' done by Muslims and Hindus, were equally pious and full of devotion. Mata Anandamoyee then began her wanderings and founded 'Kanya Peeth' at Varanasi, where Sanskrit education is imparted to girls who have vowed celibacy. She also established many Ashrams in various parts of the country to which people from different walks of life and professions were admitted for the sole purpose of rendering voluntary service to the needy and sick. Her devotees found in her a surging invitation to divine glory and spiritual eminence. Her words for the guidance of her disciples were: "In order to advance towards self-realisation, it is absolutely necessary for an aspirant to yearn constantly for God." And again:

"The aspirant while attending to his normal worldly duties, must take special care to ensure that at every moment of his life, he is absorbed in the remembrance of God."... "The aspirant should not indulge in useless conversation or gossip, but speak only when it is really necessary, which means that he must be a man of few but gentle words. He is to be extremely careful to keep himself aloof from all worldly attachment. Not only must he control his speech, but also refrain from listening to idle gossip. He should therefore, try to restrict his association with worldly people and occupation to the barest minimum. He should, however, seek company of kindred men i.e. of those of devotional temperament and spiritual yearning and listen to and participate in matters relating to God and Spirit. All else is futile. Where 'Rama' is not, there is 'Viram' or discomfort and disease."

Quite a large number of devotees have been inspired by Ma Anandamoyee. Swami Yoganand, whose 'Autobiography of a Yogi' has acquired world fame, writes about Ma Anandamoyee in extremely respectful terms. This is what he says in this book (pp. 467-472):

"Anandamoyee Ma was standing in an open topped automobile blessing a throng of about one hundred disciples. She was evidently on the point of departure. Mr Wright (who had accompanied Swami Yoganand) parked his Ford some distance away and accompanied me on foot towards the quiet assemblage. The woman saint glanced in our direction; she alighted from her car and walked towards us.

"Father, you have come." With these fervent words, she put her arms round my neck and her head on my shoulder. I had instantly seen that the saint was in a high state of Samadhi. Oblivious of her outward garb as a woman, she knew herself as the changeless soul; from that plane she was joyfully greeting another devotee of God."

Mata Anandamoyee visited Yoganand's Ashram at Ranchi and blessed the inmates. Mata Anandamoyee went into permanent samadhi on 27th August 1982 at Dehradun.

## BHIMA BOI

Bhima Boi is known as the blind bard of Orissa. He was born in a tribe in one of the hilly areas of Orissa. He was blind from his birth. He however, learnt to tend cattle and took them out for grazing in the forest and carried a stick. Once it so happened that while leading the cattle home, he fell into a dry well. His cries went unheeded as there were no inhabitants around. He remained in the well the whole night. Next morning some passersby heard his cries. They rushed to help him and pulled him out. But Bhima now refused to accept any help. He said that God had not only helped him to remain in the well well-protected, but had also helped him in life so far. Bhima remained in the well, without food and water and continued to pray. At night, Mahima Ghosal, who was a highly illumined soul came to the well. He was an 'Avadhoot'. He extended his leg inside the well. Bhima caught hold of the leg and came out. He fell at the saint's feet.

Mahima Ghosal was an exponent of 'Mahima Dharma'. Bhima Sen Boi became his disciple. Being gifted with a divine voice and a talent for composing poetry, he sang with great devotion his own compositions.

Bhima was soon initiated by his Guru, who it is said restored his eyesight by his occult powers. Bhima was informed that he had been chosen to spread Satya Sanatan Mahima Dharma. The philosophy was not new, but had been given by the old Rishies and saints. It had to be spread once again. Having attained spiritual sight, Bhima did not want physical sight and begged his master for his old condition. The master then assigned four disciples to accompany Bhima, so that his sayings and songs could be recorded. Bhajans poured out in spiritual torrent from Bhima embodying Vedantic lore. In one of his Bhajans, he says:

"Illiterate and unlettered I am-  
 I know nothing of the Vedas and Scriptures.  
 But as the Guru chose me as his instrument  
 and mouthpiece, I am uttering, whatever, He is  
 prompting from within the shrine of my heart  
 where he is seated enthroned.  
 Listen to my Guru's Updesh and redeem yourselves."

And again:

"The sufferings of humanity, the limitless  
 miseries of the world - who can bear?  
 May my life remain doomed, but let the sufferings  
 of the people mitigate."

His Bhajans satisfied the spiritual urges of his listeners. He sang his Bhajans to the accompaniment of cymbals and a 'Tamboora' or a one-stringed instrument. They increased the appeal and effect of the Bhajans and spread devotion all around.

Mahima Dharma does not require any penance or Tapasya in forests. Even when one moves in society and is detached in mind, he can attain the goal of his spiritual Sadhana. Of the Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali, the first two, Yama and Niyam are to be strictly followed.

Some of the austerities to be observed are:

- (i) No food, not even water is to be taken after sunset till the next morning.
- (ii) Purificatory bath in the early morning must be taken.
- (iii) Brahma Sharanagati and Darshan of holy places both in the morning and evening should be followed without fail.
- (iv) Reciting of Guru Mahima Alekhs should be done.

**The core of Mahima Dharma philosophy is as under:**

"There is the absolute Godhead, without any form and without any Guna (attributes). He is Advitiyam, i.e. 'One without a second'. He can be truly realised only in the shrine of one's own heart. He is omniscient and omnipresent. Through self-culture (i.e. spiritual and moral regeneration), the Absolute who is both transcendent and immanent, who is non-dual, has to be realised. That is the goal of human life. And that alone will bring about the termination of human misery."

Bhima Boi's songs are considered a rich heritage of Orissa.

## THAKUR SHRI ABHIRAM PARAMHANS

Abhiram Paramhans is popularly known as Karamala Baba after village Karamala situated on the banks of river Luna in district Puri. His father was Sathyabadi Pattanaik and Radha Devi his mother. He was born in 1904. As if to indicate the birth of a divine person, a dazzling light flashed at the time of his birth and his mother fell unconscious. While she lay in this condition, a saint from the Himalayas appeared in front of the house and explained that the light was indicative of the birth of a divine child. He asked his parents to name the child 'Abhirama' and then went away. A childless couple Arjun and his wife Subrata adopted the child. They brought him up with great care and love. They however, did not live long and the child was then brought back to his parents.

Abhiram was a naughty child and played childish pranks like the divine child Krishna in Gokul Vrindavan. Abhiram was extremely fond of milk, curd and butter and took away these articles from wherever he could, much to the embarrassment of his parents. Tired of these habits, the parents sent the boy to live with their elder son at Ganzam where he was running a private school. When Abhiram was just ten years old, his elder brother went out of the town on some business. Abhiram was left alone. He chanced to come across some palm-leave manuscripts, from which he read a passage about the great privilege one had in having a human form, as much could be accomplished in the way of self-realisation. His parents were also there. Abhiram went to a room, locked himself in and sat in a meditative and yogic posture. There was no response to the parents' loud call. When they peeped inside to find out what was happening, they were amazed to see their son levitating in the air, sitting in a lotus posture.

His father soon passed away and he was left alone. When he grew into a handsome young lad, his mother pleaded with him to get married, but he stoutly refused and

remarked that he was interested in a marriage of soul with the Supreme. Abhiram then retired to a lonely place in Brahmagiri forests and lived an extremely austere life. He ate very little and took only wild fruits that grew there. He was just seventeen or eighteen when he had the vision of Vana Durga, who advised him to spread the message of truth and permanence of the Spirit.

Abhiram carried out these injunctions and started his wanderings seeking spiritual life. He travelled to many holy places and met many holy men. But the spiritual quest was far from being fulfilled. Extreme frustration overtook him, so much so that at one time he wanted to end his life. But better counsels prevailed. From that moment many persons started to collect round him, a few of whom also became his disciples. The first one to do so was Baikuntha Baba. Abhiram now began to be called Thakur Abhiram Paramhans. For sometime Thakur Abhiram lived at Sankrail in West Bengal and preached his philosophy of love and devotion. He then returned to his native village, much to the joy of his mother. Abhiram sought his mother's permission to take Sanyasa, which was given after great reluctance.

For the next seven years viz. from 1927-1933, Thakur Abhiram visited many villages of Cuttack and helped people in their spiritual Sadhana. During his visits, he is credited with having performed many miracles. A village tank was infested with two crocodiles much to the horror of the villagers. Thakur Abhiram issued a command to the creatures to leave the tank. And they did so as could be seen, leaving the tank by weeks they had left safe. On another occasion, he transformed a huge heap of sand into coloured powder 'Abir Gulal' enabling the villagers to play Holi and enjoy the festival.

Thakur Abhiram sang his poems in a very melodious voice. His 'Sanatana Dharmarth Geeta', 'Amrit Geeta' and 'Guru Gita' are all held in great esteem even today. 'Rasotsava' and 'Bhakti Kallol' are much prized even today and are very famous. God is within and has to be realised as such, he taught. His 'Kali Bhagabata' was a biting satire on the

political conditions of the country and drew the ire of the British Government, who instituted legal proceedings against him. His writings were considered as seditious and he was jailed while the case was still being heard in a court of law. But the jail authorities themselves became his ardent admireress. His jail term of one year was reduced to a month and a half and he was released after that period.

Thakur Abhiram Paramhans spent his remaining time in preaching and took Samadhi on November 27, 1963. He is held in very high esteem by all sections of the people in Orissa.

## SHANKAR DEVA

Assam has been associated with the practice of the cult of Tantricism in its most corrupt form. The region was famous for the worship of Shakti through Tantricism. Black magic and animal sacrifice was prevalent on a wide scale. It was against this background that Shankar Deva, a contemporary of Chaitanya Maha Prabhu of Bengal appeared on the scene to teach the people the path of Vishnu worship. Chaitanya Maha Prabhu and Shankar Deva had discussed the questions of reviving Vaishnava theology and philosophy. It is said that Shankar Deva was present when the Mahaprabhu ended his life in the temple at Puri.

Assam was in the grip of fanaticism evident from the way Mother Goddess in her form of Kamakhya was worshipped by sacrificing animals and even human beings. It was believed that it was the only way of appeasing the Mother in her fierce and fearful form, instead of the all-loving and compassionate. Tantricism had degenerated to its worst for its lofty ideals and sublime philosophy had given way to crudity and profanity.

Shankar Deva was born in 1449 A.D. at Batadroba in the district of Nowgong in Assam. His father and ancestors were staunch worshippers of Shakti. His father, Kusumbar, came from an illustrious family. His mother died within three days of child birth. The child's grand-mother Khersuti brought up the infant. Upto the age of twelve, like any other child, Shankar grew up fond of sport and other youthful activities and showed little interest in studies. Being motherless, he was pampered by all and the grand-mother literally doted on him. But the grand-mother was worried at heart: One day she admonished him and shed tears as she felt that if the boy did not study, he would only bring infamy to the family in later life.

His grand-mother's tears brought about a great change in the young lad. Shankar joined a private school, locally

called TOL where his teacher was a Brahmin Pandit, Mahendra Kendall. His deep interest in studies and gift of composing poetry aroused his teacher's interest. It was felt that the boy was destined for some higher purpose in life.

During the school days a strange event transformed the whole picture of the young boy. Once during a lunch-break, when the blazing sun was sending its flaming swords, while all the other boys went home, young Shankar slept in the verandah. When the teacher returned to pick up something that he had forgotten, he was amazed to find a huge cobra standing at the head, protecting the young boy with his expanded hood from the blazing sun rays. From that moment Shankar was reverentially addressed as Shankar Deva, as every one was convinced about his divinity.

After completing school studies, Shankar Deva became a full-fledged scholar and devoted himself to learning Yogic practices. Shankar Deva's father and his grand-mother were overjoyed at noticing this change in their protege. At twenty-three, Shankar Deva was married to Suryabati. His father and grand-mother passed away soon afterwards. Suryabati also died after giving birth to a daughter. Shankar Deva felt complete renunciation after these deaths. He devoted himself completely to philosophical pursuits. But he continued to give attention to his mother-less daughter and brought her up with extreme care. When she came of age, she was married.

By this time Shankar Deva had drawn to himself many young aspirants and others of a much senior age, notably his former teacher Mahendra Kendall and the family priest. Along with seventeen disciples, Shankar Deva left on a pilgrimage of the northern India and went upto Badrinath and Dwarka in the west. Wherever he went he impressed every one by his profound philosophy and teachings. By the time he returned to Assam he was fully grown and mature person. His visit to various holy places drew him to Lord Krishna. He became completely devoted to Him and impressed upon His listeners to worship the Lord in that form by love and devotion. He began composing hymns in praise of the

Lord and wrote dramas narrating his sporting Leelas. These became extremely popular and drew huge crowds. Many became his disciples.

At this point of time, he was offered the hereditary chieftainship of the Bhuyans, but Shankar Deva declined this and said that his time was for spreading the message of love and devotion. A Brahmin Pandit, Jagdish Misra was narrating the story of Bhagwat in the Jagannath Temple at Puri. In a dream he was ordered to go to Kamrup and teach Shankar Deva the message of Bhagwat and its deeper meaning. Jagdish Misra carried out the command and went to Kamrup. He met Shankar Deva and told him about his dream. Shankar Deva was also thirsting for full knowledge and import of 'Bhagwat Purana'. The Brahmin Pandit explained the Bhagwat with all its deeper meanings and Shankar Deva felt that new vistas of understanding had been opened to him and he clearly saw the purpose of life.

Shankar Deva set out again on a pilgrimage and preached in his inimitable style the Vaishnava philosophy about absolute surrender to Lord Krishna and recitation of His name as a panacea for all ills. He held this out as the social and religious ideal for all. He devoted his speeches to condemning the current diabolical practices in Assam specially killing of innocent animals and even human beings. This created a host of enemies. His cult of EKA-SARAN, signifying unity and identity of life, had made a deep impression. His growing popularity also made many enemies. Shankar Deva then shifted to another place, Dhuyahat, situated in his native district. There he met the great Tantrik master, Madhava. An interesting story is narrated about Madhava. Once when his mother was seriously ill, he decided to obtain her cure by sacrificing a goat, thereby propitiating the Goddess. His mother did recover and then Madhava thought it fit to fulfil his promise. So he asked his brother-in-law Gayapani to bring a goat. Gayapani had become a disciple of Shankar Deva and argued about the unity of life. At his suggestion Madhava and Gayapani went to Shankar Deva. The two argued a great deal about their respective beliefs. Madhava produced scriptural evidence in support of his

stand. Shankar also produced much evidence to establish his point of view. In the end, he recited the following Shloka from the Bhagwat:

"As the branches, leaves and foliage of a tree are nourished by pouring water only at the root of the tree, as the limbs of the body are nourished by food in the stomach only, so also all the gods and goddesses are propitiated by the worship of Lord Sri Krishna only."

Madhava was greatly impressed by this recitation and bowed to the Master in reverent acknowledgement of the purity and superiority of Shankar Deva. He accepted him as his Master.

Another incident worth narrating is as follows:

The region during those days was ruled by an Ahom King. Ahoms were from Upper Burma, who had annexed large chunks of the Assamese territory. The ruler was a despotic and whimsical person. By an edict, it was desired that an arena for taming wild elephants would be erected surrounded by wooden pallisades. His subjects were asked to erect the pallisades and stand against them to ensure that elephants did not escape through the opening. Shankar Deva, Madhava Deva and Shankar Deva's son-in-law were stationed at a place along with some others in obedience to the royal decree. As it happened the elephants made their flight through an opening where these men were posted. The king ordered their arrest. Madhava escaped execution, but Shankar Deva's son-in-law Hari was not spared and was beheaded. Madhava being an ascetic was spared. Shankar Deva made good his escape and left the tyrant's kingdom and went to Barpeta in the territory of Cooch-Bihar where Madhava soon joined him. The two of them wrote some of their greatest works while living here. The creed of Vaishnavism was consolidated and the message went out under the patronage of the ruling king, who was a benevolent monarch.

Shankar Deva died in 1569, at the age of one hundred twenty years. Madhava was nominated to succeed him in the Apostolic seat.

**Shankara's philosophy:**

Shankar Deva built his philosophy on the teachings contained in 'Bhagwat Geeta' and spread the creed of Vaishnavism. He propagated the creed of Bhakti as contained in 'Shrimad Bhagwat'. Recital of the name of Lord Krishna is the supreme form of devotion in the Kali age. 'Dasya' Bhakti or the factotum type was superior to any other form. Devotion to Lord Krishna is both the beginning and end of Bhakti. Krishna is all pervasive. Every thing else is false. He also spread the philosophy of equality and said that, "All castes have equal claim on God. In reciting the name of Hari, all are equal...". "Recitation of the Lord's name enables him to overcome the three attributes or Gunas and helps him to realise the supreme God-head."

Shankar Deva's philosophy and thoughts can be seen even today, some four centuries after his death, on the people of the state.



3.

## CENTRAL REGION

(Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan)



## SANT MEERA BAI

Meera Bai has become a household name for all Hindus. She belonged to the royal family of Marwar and was married in an equally illustrious family. It was expected that she would lead a normal happy life and bear children. But she was not of the ordinary mould and dedicated her life to Lord Krishna. She was born in 1547 A.D. in village Khurki in Mewar, some forty miles from Jodhpur. Her father was Rathor Ratna. Her grand-father Rao Dudaji was a deeply religious person.

From her very childhood Meera played with an idol of Lord Krishna, which was gifted to her by a Sanyasin who happened to come to the palace. Meera was so attracted to the idol that she forgot everything and spent all her time worshipping the idol. She made garlands of flowers and decorated the idol with these and sandal paste. As a child of five, she attended a marriage and with a child-like innocence enquired from her mother, who was her husband. "Well, Girdhar Krishna is your spouse", replied her mother. The child took this very seriously and from then onwards considered herself as Krishna's bride. But according to social customs then prevailing, she was married when only eight years old. She was married to Prince Bhoja, son of Maharana Pratap of Chittor. But during the entire ceremony, she held fast the idol of Lord Krishna and considered that she was actually being married to Lord Krishna.

In her husband's house, the family deity was Goddess Durga to whom worship was offered. But Meera was reluctant to offer worship to anyone except Girdhar Krishna. She had a shrine constructed for the worship of her chosen lord and spent her time in the temple. All this did not please her husband or other relatives and some even suspected her fidelity. Meera fulfilled all her marital obligations towards her husband, but she could not give up her devotion to Lord Krishna and after performing her household duties she would retire to the shrine room and get lost in meditation and worship of the Lord.

Prince Bhoja, her husband, died leaving behind Meera who was just twenty-three. Her relatives wanted to see her immolate herself at the pyre of her husband, but she declined. She said, "Meera is all full of love for the Lord. She is bathed in His colour. She will accept no other colour. I will sing the glory of the Lord and will not immolate myself at my husband's pyre. My heart is full of devotion for Krishna. O King, (meaning her father-in-law) our relationship is now snapped and treat me as any other common citizen and leave me alone." After the death of Rana Sanga, his son Ratan Singh ascended the throne. He also died soon and was succeeded by Vikramaditya. All these developments did not deter Meera from her path of devotion. She continued to entertain other devotees and saints and would spend her time in dancing before the idol of Krishna. She composed her songs in Marwari Hindi. There are good many Gujarati and Punjabi words in her compositions. The ruling prince did not like all this and it is said that attempts were made to end her life by sending to her a cup of hemlock. But there were no deleterious effects. Other attempts of similar nature also failed.

It is said that Emperor Akbar having heard about Meera and her spiritual attainments, came to hear her Bhajans incognito accompanied by his court musician Tansen. He was so enraptured that he revealed his identity and presented to Meera a diamond necklace for decorating the Lord's idol. When the Rana heard of this, he thought that Meera was carrying on secret confabulations with the Muslim Emperor and intensified his vigil. Persecutions increased till Meera was forced to leave the palace. She undertook a journey to Vrindavan like any ordinary pilgrim. She reached Vrindavan in 1590, when she was forty-three. A famous saint Jiva Goswami lived there. Meera sought an interview with him. The request was turned down on the ground that Jiva Goswami did not grant interviews to any woman. Meera then commented that she thought there was only one male in Vrindavan, i.e. Lord Krishna and the rest were only his devotees or Gopis. When this was conveyed to Jiva Goswami, he realised his error and understood the saintliness and

spiritual superiority of Meera Bai. Jiva Goswami and other saints like Haridas recognised her as a true devotee of Lord Krishna and even declared that she was Radha reborn.

It is said that Meera was initiated by Sant Rai Das. Today the Samadhi of Sant Rai Das is situated near the palace where Meera lived. As time passed, Meera's fame spread and it is said that even the Rana, who had persecuted her, came to Vrindavan to have her darshan. From Vrindavan, Meera went to Dwarka where she lived for nearly twenty years. She passed away at the age of 67 in 1614 A.D.

Meera was a born poetess. She expressed her thoughts through poetry, which inspires many persons even today. At Dwarka, where she merged with Ranchodji (another name of Lord Krishna), a piece of Saree can be seen by the side of the idol, which is said to belong to Meera when she went there to join her Lord for all the time. Meera's life was indeed the life of a true devotee. She had drunk deep at the feet of the Lord and her love and devotion was total.

In her songs, which are Bhajans, she has sung the glory of the Lord soaked in deep devotion. All the nine forms of *Bhakti*, mentioned in the Bhagwat, are clearly discernable. They are: Shravanam, Keertanam, Smartam, Padsevanam, Vandnam, Dasyam, Sakhyam and Atma-nivedanam. Her songs are now considered the spiritual heritage of the country and they will continue to inspire generations to come.

Meera has composed about two hundred songs, which have been set in classical ragas. Her commentaries on 'Geet Govind' and 'Raag Govind' are not available now.

## KHWAJA MOINUDDIN CHISTI

The shrine of Moinuddin Chisti at Ajmer draws thousands of devotees from all parts of this country and even from abroad to seek his blessings and for a fulfilment of their wishes. It is like a wish-fulfilling tree. He is popularly called 'Garib Nawaj', meaning 'well-wisher and supporter of the poor'. Khwaja Moinuddin Hasan Chisti did not hail from Ajmer, but he made this place the scene of his spiritual activity.

Khwaja Moinuddin was born in 1135 A.D. near Sanjar (in Arabian country). By the age of nine he had learnt by heart the whole *Koran*. He then studied *Hadeeth* - traditions about Mohammad and a supplementary to *Koran*. He became well versed in the sayings of the Prophet. He spent his time in the company of mystics, hermits and what are known as 'Dervishes'. The last named are members of Mohammedan fraternities professing austerity and living a life of extreme poverty, i.e. literally a poor man. His father passed away when he was fifteen. One day, when he was watering his garden, a Sufi saint came there. Moinuddin gave him a bunch of grapes which pleased the holy man immensely. In return, the mystic pulled out an oilcake from his shoulder bag and gave it to Moinuddin to eat. As soon as it was swallowed, it produced in the boy an extreme disgust for mundane affairs and a powerful urge for spiritual life. He sold his garden and other things and distributed the money to the poor and needy and then set off in search of truth.

He studied for some time under erudite scholars like Maulana Hassamuddin and Maulana Sarfuddin in the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, but found that his thirst for knowledge could not be satisfied and he went to Baghdad. He was now twenty and when the Sufi Master Hazrat Mohiuddin Abdul Kadir Jilani saw him, he prophesied that the young man before him would inspire millions and receive their affection and devotion. The Sufi saint accepted

Moinuddin as his disciple. Moinuddin joined another Sufi saint by the name Hazrat Usman Harroni for some 20 years. Under him Moinuddin led a life of extreme austerity and made great spiritual progress. His preceptor was much pleased and permitted him to have disciples of his own. Moinuddin left his Master for a short period, but returned and spent another twenty years in his company and guidance. The two of them travelled to many places in the Middle-East countries preaching the gospel of love and brotherliness. Both the Master and he had by then possessed many occult powers, causing extreme wonder and respect amongst all who met them. He encountered many 'derivishes' who were also greatly impressed and became his disciples.

When Moinuddin had spent twenty-two years with his Master, Hazrat Usman Harroni nominated him as his successor and spiritual heir and handed over the holy relic of the Prophet, which according to a custom was handed over in the Chisty order from Master to his chosen disciple. The last instructions by the Master were, "Do not expect anything from men. Live far from the crowds and do not ask anything from any one." Noble words indeed. The Master then embraced Moinuddin and finally remarked, "I have entrusted you to the care of the Lord. You can now go." The Master then went into a trance and Moinuddin left him.

In 1190 A.D., Moinuddin was praying in a mosque in Medina, when the Prophet appeared before him and said, "Moinuddin, go to Ajmer and spread the gospel of Truth." In 1191, Moinuddin reached Ajmer with forty followers and set up his camp under a shady tree at the place where now stands the holy shrine. The ruling Raja was Prithviraj. His servants forbade the saint to set up a camp on the plea that the Raja's camels grazed there. The saint then went to Anna Sagar and remarked, "Well, if the camels sit here, let them sit." But then once the camels sat on reaching this place, it was found that they could not get up. The matter was brought to the notice of the Raja, who ordered his servants to go and apologise to the saint and crave his pardon. They did so and found that the camels were able to stand up. The

two servants, Sadhu Ram and Ajaipal, who had witnessed this miracle, became the saint's disciples.

Moinuddin Chisti, as he was now called, visited Delhi and charged the spiritual battery there, leaving behind his disciple and successor, Khwajah Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Kaki to look after the affairs there. Khwajah Moinuddin Chisti visited Baba Farid Ganj Shakkar, who was now old and weak and could not even stand up to offer his respects to the saint. Khwaja Moinuddin, however, held him by one hand and asked his disciple Qutub to hold the other hand. They then prayed to the Lord and the old fakir, Farid, stood up leaving behind all his illness and infirmity.

Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti returned to Ajmer and lived there for many years preaching to people the gospel of Truth and Love. He passed on the relics of the Prophet to his heir, Khwaja Qutubuddin and observed, "A few days from now I will be no more. I have entrusted you to God who will look after you. Go to Delhi now." The saint merged in the Eternity on 21st May 1229. He retired to his room for his prayers and the next day his disciples found that he was dead. Khwaja Moinuddin had written many books in Persian like '*Anis-ul-Arwah*' and '*Kanjul Israr*' which contain valuable spiritual gems. These have given inspiration to many devotees. Many a poverty stricken person has found solace after a visit to the holy shrine and so the Khwaja has earned the title of 'Garib Nawaz'.

## SANT RAVI DAS

Sant Ravi Das or 'Rai Das' as sometimes called, was a contemporary of Sant Kabir and had much in common with his philosophy and thoughts. He was also a disciple of Ramanand, who was Kabir's Guru. It is difficult to find out the exact details of the birth of this saint. Some scholars have however, mentioned that he belonged to the middle of fifteenth century. Some have placed his year of birth as 1440 A.D. This surmise is based on the fact that the great singer-poetess of Rajasthan, Meera Bai, was his disciple. The grand-father of Ravi Das was Harinandan, who was of a very religious temperament and spent his time in worship of God. Even though he belonged to a low caste (now called Scheduled Caste), members of other communities also respected him.

Harinandan's wife Chatar Kanwar was a devoted person and spent her time in Bhajans. The couple however, had no children and naturally pined for one. Once, Chatar Kanwar suggested to her husband that they were both getting old and if they did not beget any child, the family name would disappear. She suggested that he should set out in search of some noble saint and seek his blessings. Harinandan accepted this advice and set out accordingly. He entered dense forest looking for some hermit or saint, unmindful of the wild animals or other threats, so common in jungles. Only God's name was his shield and he continuously chanted the Lord's name. Eventually, in one of the caves he found the great saint Sanandan, who was lost in meditation. Harinandan touched the saint's feet and prostrated before him. The saint opened his eyes and asked him the purpose of his visit. "O Saint", said Harinandan, "You know everything. I have no son. I belong to the Shudra caste. There is no end to my miserable life. Kindly bless me, so that our suffering may end on this account."

Saint Sanandan was deeply moved. He raised Harinandan and assured him that he would have a son, who should be

named Rahu. With this assurance Harinandan returned and told his wife of the saint's blessings. Chatar Kanwar conceived and a son was born who was named Rahu, as advised by Saint Sanandan. The child grew and at the age of sixteen was married to Karma. Rahu was married to three other girls, but he had no offspring from any. Rahu left for the forest and was soon lost in deep meditation, following the example of his father. A saint met him there and gave blessings for a son. Rahu returned home full of joy. As predicted, he had a son by his first wife. The child was named 'Raya Das' and afterwards was called Rai Das or Ravi Das.

Ravi Das had a religious temperament from his childhood and showed signs of this when only five. At the age of sixteen, he left his home for visiting holy places. During his pilgrimage, he reached Ayodhya and took a bath in the sacred river Saryu. A Brahmin was also taking his bath and he asked the boy, who he was. Ravi Das replied that he came from Varanasi and belonged to scheduled caste. Hearing this the Pandit was furious and declared that the whole river had been polluted and how could the boy dare to do that? Ravi Das remained extremely calm and collected and replied, "Who is high and who is low. The five elements, earth, air, water, fire and space are the constituents of all life and how can one be different from another? In the eyes of the Lord, there is no distinction between a Brahmin or a Shudra. Anyone who worships Him with a pure heart is accepted by Him." On hearing this, the Brahmin became quiet. There were many other who heard Ravi Das and they were all greatly impressed.

Ravi Das afterwards went to Ramanand and begged to be accepted as his disciple. Ramanand demurred in the beginning, but agreed in the end and initiated him. Ravi Das then left on his sojourn, spreading the philosophy of equality for all human beings and of universal love. Meera Bai, the famous queen of Marwar was initiated by Saint Ravi Das. In '*Rai Das Ramayan*' there is mention of a dialogue between Kabir and Ravi Das, that goes to establish the fact that the latter was a contemporary of the former.

Sant Ravi Das propogated the philosophy of equality for all beings, and crusaded for the abolition of untouchability. His contribution for ridding the Hindu society of this scourge is truly immense. Guru Ravi Das Jayanti is celebrated in many parts of the country in the month of Magh (January-February). In Delhi, a huge procession is taken out when flowers and garlands are offered to the saint.

## SHRI SINGA JI

Singa Ji was a cowherd boy. He was born in a small village, Khajoori in Madhya Pradesh in the year 1620 A.D. His father was Bhimaji and mother, Gauraji. When the mother delivered the child, she was busy making cow-dung cakes. This place has now become a hallowed place for the devotees to gather and pay their respects. Singa had no education and spent his time in tending the cows. While thus engaged, he often thought of the cow-herd boy, who did similar job thousands of years ago and played on the divine flute. Raoraja Lakhma Singh was the chieftain of the tribe. He engaged Singa to carry his letters and equipped him suitably for the job. He was given a horse and some weapons as the area through which he had to pass was through a forest and wild animals also lived there. Singa was fearless and performed his duties without any trepidation. He did his duty, with songs of the Lord on his lips.

One day as he was carrying the mail, the strains of a song fell on his ears:

*'Samuzi leore manabhai  
Anta na hoi koi apna'*

*'O mind, understand this very well.  
In the end no one comes to you for help.'*

Singa heard the melodious voice and went towards a tree where a Sadhu was reclining and singing. He was Swami Mana Rangeer, disciple of the famous Brahmageer, whose songs were being sung. Singa was so moved that he fell at the feet of the hermit and felt that the song was meant to convey a message for him. He was so touched by what he heard that he abandoned his job, home and hearth. He devoted himself to the service of Mana Rangeer, whom he regarded as his Guru. He served him faithfully. The Master was much pleased with him and accepted him as his disciple. It was his practice to celebrate the birth of Lord Krishna on the occasion of Janmashtami. When this day

came and after preparations had been made, he asked Singa to wake him at midnight, when the Lord was supposed to have been born, so that Rangeer could complete the ritualistic pooja. While waiting for the hour to arrive, Singa began to meditate on the Lord - "How could the Lord be born every year when these celebrations take place?" mused Singa. Lost amidst such thoughts, he approached the cottage and found his master lost in sound sleep. He did not consider it fit to wake him up and performd the pooja himself. Past midnight, Rangeer was roused from sleep and finding that the hour of midnight had passed and Singa had forgotten his instructions, he shouted at him and asked him to leave him, never to show his face again. Singa Ji was sorry for his lapse and felt that he should have implicitly obeyed his Master. But orders had been given and so with a sorrowing heart, he left and went towards his village. But how could he live without seeing his Master? On the way to his village, he dug up the ground, made a cave and buried himself alive after closing the mouth of the cave.

Rangeer after some time felt sorry for having chastised the boy and in order to make amends for his temper, he went towards the village. Near the place, where Singa Ji had buried himself, the hermit saw him running towards him. The boy fell at his feet and begged to be pardoned. Rangeer expressed sorrow for his behaviour and asked the boy to return. But Singa Ji begged of his preceptor to go and meet his parents, so that they could also have the privilege of seeing him. When Rangeer met the parents, he found them in a state of mourning as their son had taken 'Jeevit-Samadhi' by burying himself in the cave. Rangeer realised what a saintly soul Singa Ji was and prayed that the place may become in future a centre for devotees to come and offer respects to the departed soul.

And so it has happened. Today thousands of devotees collect at the spot and offer sugar as their offering at the place. It is said that no ants appear at the place to eat the sugar nor the birds peck at it.

Singa Ji lives in the hearts of the inhabitants of the place. Some of his devotional songs are reproduced below:

*'Kheti Khedo Ji Harinama Ki  
Jem Mukto Labh  
Bus swas do bail Hain  
Surati Ras Lagao  
Prem Pirharne Kar Dharo  
On Gyan ki Aas lagao'*

English rendering:

*'Devote to the cultivation of Harinaam  
It will confer the highest benefit  
Use the inhaling and exhaling breaths as two bullocks  
Keep them tied together by the rope of mediation on  
God.'*

And again:

*'Roop Nahin, Rekh Nahin  
Aur Nahin Kul-Got Re  
Bin Dehi ko Sahab mharo  
Jhilmil Chamke Jot Re'*

Singa Ji said the Lord was invisible, impersonal, formless and without attributes. This is the quintessence of Adwaitic philosophy. Singa Ji was a mystic of the highest order. Today the villagers assemble every evening and sing to the beating of drums the following song:

*'Singa Bade Awalia Peera  
Jinko Sumire Runk-Ameer' ..*

4.

## **SOUTHERN REGION**

**(Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka,  
Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat)**



## BHAKTARAJ NARSI MEHTA

With the name of Mahatma Gandhi is associated the theme song, 'Vaishnava Jana To Tene Kahiye, Je Peer Parayi Jaane Rhei'. The author of this bhajan is Narsi Mehta. The Bhajan means, "He alone is a devotee of the Lord, who identifies himself with the sufferings of others."

Not much authoritative knowledge is available about the birth and early life of Narsi Mehta. Facts and fictions have got intricately mixed up. It is however, believed that Narsi Mehta was born at Taloja. He was the third son of Krishna Das and Daya Gowri. His two elder brothers were named Jivan Ram and Nirbhe Ram. When only four years old, Narsi lost both his parents. He was entrusted to the care of his grand-mother. She would take the boy to the local temple and devoutly pray to the Lord, as the boy was dumb till the age of eight. Once at the temple she met a monk, who seemed to possess occult powers. The old lady fell at his feet and implored him to do something to the orphan boy by giving him his speech. The hermit looked at the boy and declared, "Old lady, this is a marvellous boy. He will be a great saint and a Bhajan-singer and will draw huge crowds to listen with rapturous attention." He then approached the boy and whispered into his ears the Lord's name 'Radha Krishna, Radha Krishna'. The boy immediately repeated the holy names to the surprise of everyone, who heard him utter few words for the first time.

Narsi was never fond of studies. He spent his time in going to temples and stand quietly listening to Bhajans and 'Arti'. He would sit near Sadhus and listen to their discourses. His devotion was of the 'Sakhi Bhava' type. He would often dress up as a village belle and dance as if he was a Gopi dancing with the Lord to the tune of His flute. The old grandmother also passed away leaving Narsi to the care of his eldest brother and his wife. They were not very well off, though the brother was an official of some consequence at the King's court in Junagarh. They expected Narsi to do

some work instead of loitering about the whole day and singing Bhajans like a mad person. So they got him married when he was only eleven, hoping that this would bring to him some sense of responsibility. But all in vain. His wife, Manek was grief-stricken to see her husband doing no work and get reprimands that he received at the hands of his brother and sister-in-law.

After some years, a daughter was born who was named Kunwarbai. This added responsibility, however, brought about no change in Narsi's mode of life. His brother and sister-in-law became thoroughly exasperated. He was asked to leave the house and live separately. Narsi was extremely humiliated at this behaviour and quietly left the house without informing anyone. He walked and walked till he came to a shady tree in the nearby forest. Close to this tree was a Shiva temple. Narsi went to this temple and clung to the Shiva-linga and cried bitterly, praying for help all the time. He remained in that condition for the next seven days till the Lord was moved and appeared to him in the form of a monk, who offered to take him along to Dwarka to have darshan of Lord Krishna. Nothing could have made Narsi happier and he followed him. Lord Shiva then showed to him the form of Lord Krishna with all His beauty and effulgence and flute on the divine lips. Narsi was also able to see Ras Leela i.e. the sport-play of the Lord surrounded by Gopis or the village maidens dancing to the tune of his flute. Ras Leela is actually a symbolical play between the Lord, the Paramatma and the maidens - the Jeevatmas. Narsi thought the Lord had come near him and handedover a 'Divti' (light stick) along with a can of oil to light it. But Narsi was so much lost in deep thoughts about the Leela itself that he poured the oil on his hands and lighted it instead of lighting the clay-lamp. His hands went up in flames, but Narsi had no thoughts about himself and was deeply engrossed in watching the Lord's leela. One of the Gopis saw what had happened and drew the Lord's attention to this manifestation of magnificent devotion. The Lord approached Narsi and put off the flames and His divine touch healed the burning hand. Narsi loudly burst out into songs of praise of the Lord. It was set in Raag Kedar. Lord Krishna assured Narsi that whenever

he would sing in Raag Kedar. He would appear before him. Narsi was then advised to go home and look after his family. Thus blessed by Hari and Har, i.e. Lord Krishna and Lord Shiva, Narsi returned home much to the joy of his wife. Narsi took up separate lodgings and lived with his wife and daughter.

But Narsi was a different person now. He was kindled with the fire of devotion after having a beatific vision of the Raas Leela. He composed songs and Bhajans and sang the glory of the Lord through them. Narsi was also blessed with a son who was named Shamaldas. His daughter Kunwarbai was happily married with plenty of gifts and ornaments, which appeared miraculously at the appropriate time by divine grace, since Narsi himself was almost a pauper. The people in his neighbourhood saw this miracle and thereafter Narsi was called Narsi Bhagat, instead of merely Narsi Mehta.

There are many stories full of miracles about Narsi Bhagat and how at the time of distress the Lord came to his succour. Narsi Bhagat did not believe in caste or colour. Untouchability, which was the curse of his times, was an anathema to him. Once he accompanied his uncle and was met by a person of low caste, who requested them to visit his village, sing Bhajans and take meals in their company. Narsi Bhagat immediately agreed, but his uncle demurred and only accepted fruits. After the Bhajan session was over and the repast taken, the two looked back and to their utter astonishment saw that there was no trace of the village or its inhabitants. So this was the Leela of Krishna to test Narsi Bhagat. His fame and name spread far and wide. People from all over came to visit him and listen to his devotional Bhajans. This popularity also created antagonism in certain quarters, specially amongst the Brahmins, who did not approve of Narsi Bhagat's fraternal dealings with people of low caste. It was blasphemy, they thought to sing Lord's name before such 'unholy' audiences.

The Brahmin community decided to teach him a lesson. A rich person from Vadnagar was looking for a suitable

match for his daughter. He was named Madan Mehta. The Brahmins spread stories that Narsi Bhagat was a very rich person and by a clever ruse they arranged the marriage with Narsi Bhagat's son. When Madan Mehta approached Narsi Bhagat with the proposal, Narsi Bhagat came out frankly and admitted that he was a very poor man indeed, who could not provide suitable gifts or ornaments to his daughter-in-law. Impressed by this candour, Madan Mehta insisted on the alliance and so the date of marriage was fixed.

The day of marriage came, but Narsi Bhagat had no money to make any preparations for the same, except praying to the Lord to come to his succour. The party consisting of a few devotees, Sadhus and Harijans left for Vadnagar. When they were near the destination, they were met by a party consisting of elephants, palanquins, horses etc., suitably decorated and with many gifts of valuable clothes and ornaments for the bride. Some members of the party came to Shamal Das, the bride-groom and decked him with rich clothes and ornaments appropriate for the occasion. When Madan Mehta received the party ceremoniously, he was wonder-struck on beholding the splendour and richness of the party. He was in a way greatly apprehensive in this connection, knowing the financial status of Narsi Bhagat. The marriage was solemnised in a grand manner. Narsi Bhagat realised that the Lord again had come to his help and provided the equipment necessary for the occasion and saved him from social disgrace.

After this, Narsi Bhagat came to Junagadh in order to settle down. A great misfortune struck him. He lost his only son who had been recently married. But he took the whole affair in a philosophical way and maintained his composure. He was once approached by the Harijans to visit their colony and perform Bhajans, so that they also could share his joy in the Lord's glory. Narsi readily agreed, "Why, everyone is entitled to bathe in His glory and there can be no question of Harijans or non-Harijans." He asked them to keep the premises clean when he visited their colony. He kept his words and sang many devotional songs and enthralled all his audience. On returning he found a new tragedy awaiting

him in the sudden demise of his wife. For a moment he thought he had broken down completely, but he regained his composure on seeing that this was another test that the Lord had held out to him. Now he decided to devote all his time and energy to performing Kcertans and singing Bhajans.

Local population did not take kindly to Narsi Bhagat holding a Bhajan session in the Harijan colony. They complained to the king that Narsi Bhagat was indulging in blasphemy. They ostracised him and produced him before the king to answer charges of heresy. Sharangdhar, who was the leader of the opposing party, complained to the ruler Rao Mandalik. He manipulated things in such a way that some monks were persuaded to come to the king's court and complain about Narsi Bhagat. The main charge was that Narsi Bhagat permitted members of all communities including untouchables to attend his Bhajan sessions. Narsi Bhagat replied that in the eyes of the Creator all were equal and had every right to seek His grace. Narsi Bhagat did not accept the offer to engage in a wordy discussion on the subject with the monks, but he was steadfast in his views about the divine law of equality for all. The king decided to test his devotion and asked him to sit in front of the temple with its doors locked. The garland in his hands must go to the lord through the doors if his devotion was genuine. Narsi Bhagat had no choice, but to accept the challenge. He seated himself in front of the locked doors and prayed loudly to the Lord to come to his rescue once again. He sang the Bhajans in Raag Kedar. No sooner had he done this, the garland flew from his hands and was round the neck of the Lord's image inside the temple. Once again his name and fame were saved by the Lord.

Narsi Bhagat has left behind him a rich legacy of devotional songs immortalised by the incomparable Mahatma Gandhi who ended his speech sessions by this song given at the beginning.

## SANT JALARAM BAPA

Jalaram Bapa was born in Virpur in Gujarat in the year 1801. His father was Pradhan Thakkar and mother Raja Bai. He had an elder brother named Bodharam. Another brother followed him and then three sisters. A famous saint Raghuvir Das had blessed the couple after the birth of their first son and had predicted that the boy would be a great saint, who would earn a great name and fame. Under such auspicious predictions Jalaram was born.

From his childhood, Jalaram was very kind-hearted and tender in his feelings. He had a very charitable disposition. He was wont to give charities to the needy much to the discomfort of his father, who was a person of modest means. He tried much to dissuade his son from such generosity, but it was of no use. Jalapa would distribute foodgrains and other household articles to whosoever asked for them. An interesting incident at this stage of his life is narrated. An old *Sanyasi* after visiting Ayodhya came to Virnagar and asked Jalaram's mother to bring the child to him. But Jalaram had already come there. The old *Sanyasi* asked him, if he recognised him. A veil seemed to lift and the young boy immediately recognised his old Master of his previous life and the chant of 'Ram Nam' came from his lips. The *Sanyasi* left after this incident, but the Lord's name became the constant refrain of the young boy.

When he was sixteen, he was married to Vira Bai, who was a noble and pious girl. But Jalaram was not interested in mundane matters. His habit of giving alms continued. So his father asked him to find a separate establishment for himself in the hope that Jalaram would become more worldly-wise and start earning his own livelihood. Jalaram had to leave his father's home. Jalaram's uncle was very fond of him and as he had no children himself, he asked the couple to come and live with him. He had a grocery shop and asked Jalaram to attend to it. But Jalaram's charitable disposition continued. Another memorable incident occurred

at this time. Virpur was frequently visited by Sadhus and mendicants, who had to pass through the town while on their way to Girnar. Once as all other shops in the town were closed excepting Jalaram's, they all collected at the place. Jalaram gave them everything the shop contained including cloth to those who had torn clothes. The shop was practically emptied. Some people were hostile to Jalaram, because of his uncle's fondness for him. They went and complained to the uncle of the doing of his nephew. The uncle became furious and came to the shop and started checking the various items to discover the shortage. Poor Jalaram was too scared and began to pray to the Lord to come to his rescue and protect him from the wrath of his uncle. There was indeed a miracle. When the uncle checked the store, he found that all items were complete and the bags of grain etc. were all as before.

All this happened, because Jalaram performed all his acts as 'Ishwar-arpnam' i.e. a dedication to God. Jalaram was himself puzzled at this miracle. His spiritual urges, that were dormant hitherto burst out and transformed him completely. The change came to the notice of his uncle and he sent him to visit holy places in the country, such as Ayodhya, Kashi, Prayag and Badrinath etc. During the journey, he was initiated by a saint named Bholaram. With his Guru's blessings he began his *Sadavrat* when he was just twenty. He commenced distribution of foodgrains with just forty measures. The very first person to visit him was a saint, who presented to Jalaram idols of Lord Ram, Lakshman and Seeta, and asked him to offer worship to them everyday. After starting the worship, Jalaram got a vision of Hanuman, the monkey-God and decided to build a temple for his worship. Jalaram had a temple built and the idols presented to him by the saint along with the idol of Hanuman were ceremoniously installed.

But the hospitality practised by Jalaram caused many problems and severely strained his means, even though Jalaram worked very hard in the field to continue his '*Sadavrat*', or free gift of food to all who came for it. Jalaram prayed to Lord Ram to help him in his task and continued

his practice of hospitality. At this time, a tailor named Haraji came to him. He had a very severe stomach-ache. His illness had not responded to any treatment by the Vaidyas and he continued to suffer excruciating pain. He approached Jalaram to cure him. Jalaram prayed to the Lord and the tailor got cured. He fell at Jalaram's feet and addressed him as *Bapa*. Since then the name by which he was known became 'Jalaram Bapa'. Jalaram Bapa is said to have cured a case of blindness and another of paralysis. Popular songs attributed to the praise of Jalaram were composed. One such song was:

*"Jeru Ko Na Deva Allah  
Wska Deve Jala"*

This meant that when God had denied something, it was given by Jala Bapa. Jalaram Bapa drew many people to his cause and generous contributions were made to his Ashram, so that charities could go on unimpeded. The Maharaja of Dharangadhara presented two huge grinding stones for use in the kitchen and the Nawab of Junagarh some land for the Ashram. Jalaram Bapa had to face many tests also. One such incident was memorable. An old Sadhu came to him and Jalaram Bapa offered him food from his '*Sadavrat*', but the Sahdu declined it. He said that he was old and did not require any food, but needed someone to look after him in his old age. Jalaram Bapa should offer his wife for the purpose. Jalaram Bapa immediately complied with this request. The wife accompanied the saint to serve him. On reaching the outskirts of the forest, she was asked to stay back and look after the saints 'Dand' (staff) and 'Kamandal' (begging bowl) while he was away. She obeyed and stayed back guarding the hermit's properties. But there was a voice from heaven which said that both Jalaram Bapa and his wife had passed the test, the lady should return to her husband, install the 'Staff' and 'the begging bowl' in the temple and offer worship everyday. The lady did as commanded.

Jalaram and his wife lived happily afterwards. Jalaram had a daughter, who was married to Bhaktiram. Jalaram took *Samadhi* in 1882, at the age of 81 years. He is held in high esteem by the towns-people even to this day and the Ashram continues its charities without a break.

## SAINT POETESS GAURIBAI OF GUJARAT

In the town of Giripur or Dungarpur, a girl named Gauri Bai, was born in 1759 A.D. This town is situated on the border of Gujarat and Rajasthan in district Wagad. She was born in a Nagar family. This caste is a minority caste, but is well known and distinguished. This is because the women folk of this caste are all literate. This state of literacy is not only existent today, but was there even centuries ago. No information is available about Gauri Bai's parents, but she had a sister named Champu. Champu had two daughters, named Chaturi and Jamana and a son Phulshankar. Chaturi lost her husband within a year of her marriage. Jamana was married to Belshankar and had two sons named Prabhashankar and Rupshankar.

According to the then prevalent custom, Gauri was betrothed when she was just five or six. Before the ceremony she had an attack of conjunctivitis. This was considered an evil omen and the prospective groom died within a week. There was real calamity for the family, but Gauri observed philosophically, "This was God's will. We must all submit to His dictates." As was the custom, Gauri lived with her parents. There were no regular schools for girl's education. So Gauri continued her studies at home applying her mind to spiritual subjects and sang devotional hymns in praise of God. After sometime she began to compose devotional songs herself. Widow marriage was not in vogue. According to the prevalent customs, a widow was expected to remain at home and devote all her time to worship of God and in quiet meditation. Gauri fell in line with this custom as she realised when just thirteen that there was no other way of life available to her.

Raja Shiv Singh was the ruling monarch of Giripur. He was a deeply religious person. He was always lost in thinking of ways that would ameliorate the condition of his subjects. Finding that the people of his state were deceived by false weights and measures, he introduced standard weights,

called 'Shiva-sai weights'. Defaulters were warned of severe punishment in cases of default. He heard about the religious deeds of Gauribai and came to visit her. They were soon engaged in spiritual discussion. Raja Shiv Singh was much impressed by her learning and scholarliness. He had a temple constructed with a central pond for puja by Gauribai. In 1780 A.D., Gauribai had an idol of God Krishna installed in the temple and shifted to the place herself. She continued to reside in the temple devoting all her time in worship of God. Her niece Chaturi, who was also a widow, stayed with her. After some time her other niece Jamana and another old relative also came to live with her.

Gauribai supervised the working of the temple and left no stone unturned to provide necessary decorative articles and to keep the premises spotlessly clean. Visitors to the temple started pouring in and the place became a good meeting ground for people immersed in spiritual matters. Bhajans, Keertans and discourses became the order of the day. Gauribai was present always and benefitted from such meetings. Her inner promptings to compose devotional songs received a stimulus and she progressed in this line day after day. Once the temple was visited by a great Sadhu or ascetic. When he saw Gauribai's devotion, he was greatly impressed and observed, "You are truly an incarnation of the great Mirabai of Mewar. There was great devotion in Mirabai, but it was not matched by learning and knowledge. That shortfall has been made good in this life. I have come to give you knowledge and wisdom". He then spent some time with Gauribai and helped to open her inner eye to divine knowledge. He gave her new directions and presented a small statue of Lord Krishna. He then went away and never came back.

Along with devotion and wisdom a spirit of renunciation also came to Gauribai. She often would go into 'Samadhi' or trance and at one time she remained in that condition for full fifteen days. Haria, the old woman, who lived with Gauribai, saw her in that state and pierced many needles in her skin to see if there was life. That produced no effect, but when afterwards the niece Chaturi was giving Gauribai a bath she

noticed the needles and wondered who had done that. Nobody owned the mistake. After sometime Haria, the old women had leucoderma all over her body along with many festering wounds. She then came, fell at the feet of Gauribai and craved her pardon. Gauribai told her that the wounds would heal, but the spots would remain.

Gauribai continued to live there. She always wore white saree and rosary of Tulsi beads round her neck. Her countenance beamed always with a spiritual glow. She lived in the temple till 1804 when she felt that she must visit 'Braj Bhumi' the birth place of Lord Krishna. The Raja of Giripur when told about her plans, came to her and pleaded with her to stay in his kingdom. Gauribai's plans had been made and decided to stick to them. On her way to Mathura, she travelled to Jaipur. Her name and fame had reached the ruling monarch there and he came forward to welcome her to his territory and implored her to live there. The Rani of Jaipur came to meet her and offered five hundred gold sovereigns at her feet as a gift. "For an ascetic like me, what use is there for such wealth?" But when the Rani persisted, she gave the money to one of her companions with instructions to distribute the amount to deserving Brahmins.

The Raja of Jaipur had heard that God used to appear before Gauribai and he thought of testing the truth. There was a temple built by the Raja for Lord Krishna where pujah and Bhajans were held regularly. The Raja asked the priest to decorate the idol with costly apparel and ornaments and then lock the door for visitors. He then invited Gauribai to the temple. Outside on the terrace, there was a formal recitation of *Shrimad Bhagwat*. The Raja invited Gauribai to grace the occasion by her presence. After the recitation was over, he requested Gauribai to narrate the manner in which the Lord's idol had been decorated. Gauribai remarked, "O Raja, I am like any other ordinary mortal human being. Who has told you that I possess divine powers? But God is merciful and He never lets down His devotees." She thereafter sang a devotional song and was lost in meditation. The Lord's dress was then described in detail, but there was no crown on His head. This surprised everybody, because they

thought that it was not possible that the crown should be missing. The door of the temple was opened and all were surprised to see that the crown had fallen down and was no more on the head of the idol. The Raja felt extremely ashamed at his behaviour and begged pardon of the saint. He offered to donate the palace, where she resided and to bear all the necessary expenses, but the saint refused. She only agreed to leave behind in the temple the idol which was in her possession and to whom she offered worship everyday. The Raja had to be content with this alone.

Gauribai remained at Mathura, Vrindavan and Gokul for some time and then went to Kashi along with her nephew. The ruling prince there was Maharaja Sunder Singh, who had heard about the saint. He requested Gauribai to be his guest. He was also fond of composing devotional songs. Both Gauribai and the Raja spent time in composing devotional verses. Gauribai initiated him to the practice of Yoga and meditation. The Maharaja became a disciple of Gauribai. She then undertook a pilgrimage to Jagannath Puri. She returned to Kashi after her pilgrimage to Puri and then went into a trance for seven days when she realised that her end was nearing. She informed her niece that she would leave the mortal coil on Ram Navmi day on the banks of Yamuna. Maharaj Sunder Singh made all arrangements for her journey to the desired place. Gauribai left the earth on Ram Navmi day in 1809 A.D. in her fiftieth year.

Most of Gauribai's compositions are in Gujarati language. There are here and there Rajasthani words mixed, as was to be expected. Some of her compositions are in Hindi as well. Due to long stay in Gokul, Vrindavan, Mathura and Kashi she had come to understand Hindi very well and wrote some of her Bhajans in that language. Many have compared Gauribai to the river Ganges, because of her purity. And so she was.

## SANT DNYANESHWAR

Dnyaneshwar (also spelt as Jnaneshwar or Gyancshwar) was a true saint in the literal sense. The root meaning of the word 'Sant' is "Sat Karoti or samyak karoti santah utchhyate". His achievements in a short span of 21 years are truly remarkable for the depth of his learning and his scholarliness steeped in spiritual matters. He was born at Alandi near Pune. His father Vithalpant Kulkarni and mother Rukhmabai were highly spiritual and had drunk deep spiritual waters at the feet of great Nath Yogis. Who were Nath Yogis or 'Siddha-Naths'? A 'Siddha' is a realised person, a person who is well established in Yoga and has acquired proven merits. Siddhas belonged to 'Vajrayani' or 'Nath' cult. There have been Bouddha and Jain Siddhas also, but the Nath Siddhas claim their origin from Adinath, an appellation given to Lord Shiva. The famous 'Nava-nath' or the Nine Naths are (i) Matsyendranath, (ii) Gorakhnath, (iii) Meena, (iv) Chourangi, (v) Charpati, (vi) Jalanadar, (vii) Nagarjun, (viii) Bhartrahari and (ix) Gahaninath.

What was the philosophy of the Nath-followers and what were their teachings? They were Hath-Yogis and Tantriks. 'Yoga' means union, the two letters 'Ha' and 'Tha' stand for the two breaths from the left and right nostrils called 'Surya' (Sun) and 'Chandra' (Moon) Nadis. Control of breath called 'Pranayam' was necessary to keep the body active and healthy. The two words also signified activisation of 'Kundalini' or the 'serpent-power' resident in a person which is energised by the two nadis Ida and Pingala running through the hollow spinal chord, called 'Sushumna'. The power operates through the six Chakras or the whirling discs of living energy situated at six centres of the body, the last centre situated in the head called 'Sahasrar'. The whole procedure is called awakening of the Kundalini power. Once energised, it raises a person to new levels of consciousness and to undisclosed dimensions. The Yogi acquires new perceptions. The Tantra-Shastra, which co-existed with the Vedas, showed the practical side of the knowledge and wisdom contained in the

Vedas and had the same relationship as exists between Science and Technology. They are both necessary and one has no use without the other.

The greatest exponents of this philosophy and cult were Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath. It was a cult that spread to all parts of the country. Powerful centres were established in Assam notably in Kamakhya, in Punjab, Kashmir, Maharashtra and Kerala. The cult began with the great Matsyendranath, who was originally called Vishnu Sharma. His exact birth details are not available, but he belonged to about 980 A.D. According to Dr Bagchi, he originally came from Bengal. This is what he writes in his book '*Studies in Tantras*' published by Calcutta University (1939):

"It is therefore, natural to suppose that Matsyendranath and his school originated and flourished in Bengal and most probably in East Bengal (in Chandra Dwip which in the present state of our knowledge may be located in the deltaic island of Sundweep). The teachings of the school later on spread to different parts of India and the original legend was elaborated and expanded in different fashions in those places."

Matsyendranath's disciple Gorakhnath is even better known. He lived sometime between 1050-1150 A.D. His work '*Sidh-Siddhamat*' throws valuable light on the philosophy of the sect. It is said that his teacher, Matsyendranath had developed leaning towards the Assam school of the Tantriks, but he was weaned away by his disciple Gorakhnath. This sect still exists and its adherents can be found in various parts of the country. But to return to Sant Dnyaneshwar - His writings have revealed much information, both about Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath and about the teachings of the Nath-sect. In a nutshell, it is said that the human body is a microcosm and by vigorous, sustained and rigid efforts, it can be tuned to receive vibrations from the macrocosm and thereby wake up to supreme cosmic consciousness.

Dnyaneshwar's father Vithalpant was of a religious bent of mind and so were his father, grand-father and great-

grand-father. Tryambakpant was Dhyaneshwar's great-grandfather and was an erudite scholar of the Vedas. The family was Deshasth Brahmin, Yajurvedi and observed Madhyandin rituals. Vithalpant was born when his father was 55. He left Paithan, his home town and came to Alandi which was then called Alankapuri. Vithalpant stayed at the local Siddheshwar temple. He married Rukmini Bai, daughter of Sidhopant and Umabai. The newly married couple left on a pilgrimage of the holy places in the South and returned to Alandi after some time. Vithalpant could not apply his mind to family life and often felt like renouncing the world and the family. In this frame of mind he left on a pilgrimage. At Kashi (Varanasi) he met Ramanand and was initiated by him as a 'Sanyasi' or ascetic and took sacred vows renouncing the world. He made a false statement that he had neither a family nor children. At home his wife Rukmini Bai was worried at the disappearance of her husband till news reached her that he had gone to Kashi and taken Sanyas.

In the meantime Ramanand Swami visited the southern part of the country on a pilgrimage. While at Alandi, Rukmini Bai went for his 'darshan' and fell at his feet. The Saint blessed her for the prosperity of her husband and children. Poor Rukmini Bai burst into tears and narrated how her husband had forsaken her and taken sanyas with his guru at Kashi and so how could she get children? Ramanand understood from the description given that the man whom he had initiated was no other person than the lady's husband. On return to Kashi, when confronted Vithalpant confessed his guilt and returned to Alandi to look after his wife, as ordered by his mentor.

His first son Nivrittinath was born in 1273 A.D., followed by Dnyaneshwar Nath after two years and Sopan after another two years. The last child, a girl, Muktabai was born in 1279. But the society did not approve of his return to family life after having embraced ascetism. Resultantly, the couple along with the four children were ostracised and disowned by the community. A council of the local Pandits was constituted to judge the case and pronounce punishment. The verdict was that the couple should end their lives. Not

being able to bear the agonies of their children, who were denied alms and food, the couple went to Kashi and drowned themselves, as they thought that it was the best way to release their children from the curse.

The children went from door to door to be taken back into the social circle, so that they could continue their education; but the local population was dead set against them. They however, said that if the Pandits of Paithan could declare the children fit for initiation or 'upnayan' samskaar, the society could accept them. The four small children then trudged their way amidst great difficulty to Paithan, where fresh encounters awaited them. How could children of a Sanyasi be considered legitimate or be entitled to learn and recite Vedas or the holy books? When Dnyaneshwar remonstrated against this view and declared that the cosmic and divine power that resided in every living being could not be differentiated. Some one asked him if the he-buffalo standing near the temple could also recite Vedas? Dnyaneshwar could not restrain himself and approached the animal and willed that the beast should recite Vedas. And a miracle occurred: From the throat of the animal came out sounds chanting Vedic hymns. The Pandits, who saw this miracle, recognised the supremacy of Dhyaneshwar and greeted him accordingly. From that moment there was no going back and the children returned to Alandi amidst popular adulation and applause.

Nivrittinath had been initiated to Nath cult by Gehininath and in turn he initiated his younger brother Dhyaneshwar. Sopan and Muktabai soon followed. The foursome led an austere life drawing many followers. Under his mentor's advice, Dnyaneshwar wrote 'Dnyaneshwari', a commentary on 'Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta' - the Lord's song. In the local Shiva temple the saint composed the Geeta in 'Marathi Ovi' form running into 9023 stanzas. His disciple, Satchidanand, who having been declared dead was being carried for cremation, was revived by the mere touch of the young Master Dnyaneshwar. He became the scribe and wrote down his Master's work. Originally it was called 'Bhavarth-Deepika', but after Dnyaneshwar's Samadhi, it was named 'Dnyaneshwari'.

The foursome along with their followers visited Pandharpur, where they met another famous saint, Namdeo, who became a follower of Dhyaneshwar. On their return to Alandi another interesting event awaited them. Changdeo, who was reputed to be fourteen hundred years old and was a great tantric and yogi, was induced by Dnyaneshwar's enemies to admonish him for his audacity to write 'Geeta' in Marathi and also confounding the people by his trickeries. Changdeo thought of writing a letter, but when he took the paper, he could not decide how to address him and so he sent the blank paper as his epistle. When it was delivered, Muktabai observed that Changdeo even after having lived for fourteen hundred years continued to remain blank. This story was carried to Changdeo, who then decided to visit Dnyaneshwar after he received a letter from Dnyaneshwar which consisted of 65 'ovis', later on called 'Changdeo Prashasti'. Changdeo summoned his mount, a lion and took a cobra snake as a lash and started for Alandi with a retinue of his followers who played dumb-bells, cymbals, etc shouting hoarsely their master's supremacy. When the crowd approached Alandi, Dnyaneshwar along with his two brothers and sister was sitting on a mud wall. When Changdeo with his strange mount and whip approached, the saint willed and the mud-wall flew into air towards the approaching crowd. Changdeo was stunned to behold this unique manifestation of divine power and when the foursome landed before him, he prostrated before Dhyaneshwar and became his disciple.

### His Works

Dnyaneshwar's Guru and elder brother Nivrittinath felt that 'Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta' was not properly understood or followed, as it was written in Sanskrit. He enjoined on his younger brother and disciple to write the same in Marathi. The three brothers and sister were at this time living at Newas on the banks of river Pravara. Dhyaneshwar composed 'Dnyaneshwari' which was originally called 'Bhavarth Deepika'. It had 9023 ovis, (short lyrical verses) expounding the meaning and unravelling the mysteries of the Divine Song. They lived in the local Shiva Temple. Satchidanand

Baba, a close devotee of Sant Dnyaneshwar, wrote down his Master's words. It was completed while they lived in the temple.

In between the commentary are spread here and there deep mystical truths of great occult significance. One can find in the learned commentary on the various chapters of 'Geeta', the gradual unfolding of the Lord's teachings for Arjun's benefit leading by gradual steps to enlightenment and removal of ignorance and doubts. But there is something else also. One cannot be mistaken to find the Master's keen spiritual insight in the explanation of occult matters for the readers to understand and follow Karma Yoga. Sant Dnyaneshwar was an exponent of Adwait philosophy or Monism as propagated by the great Adi Shankaracharya, who had preceded Dnyaneshwar. Hath Yoga was not merely an adjunct of Tantricism, but was a method of developing will power, so that it could be more effectively utilised for the service of humanity.

There have been previous commentaries on 'Geeta', notably by Adi Shankaracharya and others as also some incognito works on the subject, but 'Dnyaneshwari' was unique in many respects. It abounds in intellectual as well as spiritual overtones and is almost idyllic in its expositions at certain places. It propounded the theory of 'Gyan-Bhakti' Yoga, that is blending of wisdom-devotion approach to life's problems as opposed to pure intellectualism and devotion, piety and religious worship of God.

His another great work was 'Amritanubhav'. It is a philosophical treatise. It dwells on many occult subjects. The six Chakras or whirling discs of vibrant and vital energies, Kundalini or the serpent power and other relevant information is contained in this work. The third important work of the saint is 'Chang-deo Pashishti' or a collection of sixty-five ovis written to the great Tantric and Yogi Changdeo who had come out to challenge the Master, but eventually became one of his ardent devotees. The Saint had addressed this epistle in the most polite, courteous and endearing language which had already converted the Tantric to an admirer of Dnyaneshwar before meeting him actually.

When Dnyaneshwar attained the age of twenty-one, he took his Guru's permission to end his corporal existence by entering a cave and die in isolation. Nivrittinath and his numerous devotees and admirers were appalled at this suggestion, but having obtained his Master's permission, Dnyaneshwar bathed in the river and sat cross-legged on a mat placed for the purpose, first saluted his Guru and then all those present and said, "Forgive me my friends, if I have offended any of you and kindly grant me permission to go." With tears rolling down their eyes, the entire gathering specially Sopan, Mukta, Namdeo and the mystic Changdeo sought the saint's blessings before his departure. The saint consoled them with words of piety and compassion and told them to rely on the Lord and said, "Let Him be your support, grieve not." He then recited the 9th chapter of the Geeta "Raja Vidya Raja Guhya Yoga" which describes the *Saulabhy* aspect of the Lord. When Dhyaneshwar descended to the bottom of the pit, he sat cross-legged, with his hands resting on his knees and his eyes fixed upwards. He plunged into self-absorption and went into final 'Samadhi' merging his life into the Eternal and Cosmic. Thus came an end to his earthly life which was as unique as his end.

Dnyaneshwar's greatness has somewhat eclipsed the career of his two brothers and the youngest sister Muktabai. Nivrittinath, the eldest also wrote a commentary on 'Geeta' called '*Nivritteaswari*', which also dwelt on the Dualistic and Monistic philosophy. His other works contain deep mystical truths and respectful references to his Guru and preceptor Gahininath, who had initiated him to the Nath sect. Similar contributions to philosophical thought have also been made by the saint's younger brother Sopan Dco and the youngest sister Muktabai. All died after Dhyaneshwar at two years' interval.

The four names given to these children are significant. 'Nivrittinath' means 'the controller and subduer of senses'. As is known, evolution proceeds on two paths, 'nivitti' and 'pravitti'. In the latter, spirit descends to matter in a downward arc; whereas in the former, spirit ascends from the matter in the manner of an upward arc. Nivrittinath belonged to the

upward arc. Dnyaneshwar was so called, as he was the 'holder and lord of all knowledge and wisdom'. Truly he was so. The third one Sopan Deo meant, 'the Way - the pathway to God', whereas Mukta the last one was a name implying 'salvation or release'. It is believed that the four children were the incarnations of the four Vedas viz. Rig, Yajur, Sam and Atharva Veda. This is, of course, symbolical as they were born to bring Vedic truths to the erring humanity.

Alandi is just about 25 kms from Pune. There is no rail-head serving the place, but there are roadways buses plying from all over connecting Alandi. The road is good and many visitors today visit the place by their cars and taxis. On the way Kirkee Factory, Yerwada Deccan College, Mental Hospital, Military quarters and Dighi Wireless Station are situated. There is as such a constant flow of traffic on the road to Alandi. From the Shivajinagar bus stand in Pune at least 25-30 roadways buses ply every day between Pune and Alandi to carry devotees. On the eleventh day of the bright Moon (Vadya Ekadashi) the number of visitors increases manifold. On this day during the month of Kartik (October-November) the number of devotees runs into lacs. At Alandi the ruler is Dnyaneshwar Maharaj. His name is supreme and thousands of devotees pay their respect and adoration to the saint, who lived more than seven hundred years ago. His 'Dnyaneshwari' is read at his Samadhi by thousands. In the month of Ashadh (June-July) on the thirteenth day of bright-Moon-day, pilgrims in their thousands come to Alandi and after prostrating themselves before the Samadhi, carry the immortal book 'Dnyaneshwari' upto Pandharpur. The pilgrims are called 'Varkari'. No other saint in Maharashtra has evoked so much adoration as this saint has. Eknath Maharaj, Tukaram Maharaj, Samarth Ramdas Swami have all been great saints in their own way, but no one has touched the heights which Sant Dnyaneshwar has. He towers over others like the Himalayas.

According to a legend Sant Eknath Maharaj, who came about years after Sant Dnyaneshwar, had a dream during a nocturnal visitation by the famous saint, that he should come to Alandi and meet him there. Eknath did as instructed.

On reaching Alandi, he entered the cave where the great saint had taken 'Samadhi' and found some branches of a tree encircling the place. Let us see what Eknath has himself to say about his experience:

(Free-hand translation)

"Shri Dnyan Dev came to me in my dreams,  
He told me in confidence;  
A tree has entwined the samadhi upto the neck.  
Eknath should come to Alandi and remove the twigs.  
And so I came to Alankapuri and then I saw the cave at  
whose mouth, an idol of Nandi had been installed."

Eknath Maharaj says that he was asked by the Master to make suitable corrections in 'Dhyaneshwari' where many errors had crept in when the work was written by hand. Eknath did as he was told and a corrected copy from that day is now available. This has been confirmed by Eknath Maharaj himself in his verses.

When one visits the saint's Samadhi, the last Samadhi is of Muktabai, the sister and then the idol of Nandi, as if guarding the Samadhis. The statue of Nandi faces the Siddheshwar Temple. It is towards the west, an idol of Lord Ganpati towards the east and in the centre is the Saint's Samadhi. When leaving the Siddheshwar temple, one sees the tree called 'Ajaan Vriksha'. It is considered very ancient and holy. It is said that before entering the cave for Samadhi, the saint had kept his wooden staff at the mouth of the cave. In course of time the staff struck roots and grew into a mighty tree. The staff was planted into the soil by Nivrittinath himself. The roots of this tree had entered the cave and surrounded the saints' samadhi, which was cleared by Eknath Maharaj, as mentioned earlier. The tree as such acquired lot of sanctity. On any visit to the place, there will always be twenty to thirty devotees reciting Dhyaneshwari at the foot of this tree. A solitary leaf falling away from this tree is picked with great veneration and preserved as divine gift.

To govern local affairs, a Municipal Board was created in 1867. The annual income then was about five thousand rupcs. It has gone upto nearly one lac today. The pilgrim tax, which was imposed earlier, has also been abolished. The population of the town is about seven to eight thousand today. Due to its close proximity to Pune, facilities like electricity, telephones and filtered water supply are now available. It takes about forty-five minutes for journey by road from Pune.

The building that houses the saint's Samadhi is known as 'Devool Wada' meaning 'House of God'. On the eastern side of this building is the idol of Lord Ganpati and therefore the gate is known as 'Ganesh Dwar'. Towards the west is the river from where water was fetched and as such it is called 'water-gate'. The main gate is towards the north and is used by pilgrims to enter the building. One thing is very noticeably prominent. The first stair leading to the temple is worshipped by the devotees and no one dares to step on it. The stair is called 'Haibat Baba's stair'. Everyone entering the temple first worships this stair. It is said that Haibat Baba, a staunch devotee of Sant Dnyanshwar ended his life on this particular place.

This is the story of this remarkable person. Originally the Baba had Pawar as his surname. He was the Deshmukh of a village in the district of Satara. He also held a high position in the court of Scindhias of Gwalior. Once while coming from Gwalior to his village, he was attacked by bandits and then shut in a cave with the intention of executing him on the next day. Thus confined, the Baba prayed to Sant Dnyanshwar to come to this rescue. It so happened that on that particular night, the chief of the bandits was full of joy as his wife gave birth to a son. He attributed this good fortune to the presence of his captive and ordered his immediate release. Baba took his release as a divine grace from the eminent saint and instead of proceeding to his native village, he turned towards Alandi and surrendered to the service of the Samadhi till his end i.e. some twelve years later. When he was laid up with illness, the saint appeared to some eminent towns people and asked them to

bring the aged person to the temple, so that he could spend his last days there. Baba spent the remaining years of his life there devoting all his time to quiet meditation and reciting Dnyaneshwari before the Samadhi. Till then the custom was that followers of 'Vaarkari Panth' used to carry the saint's 'sandals' by tieing them round the neck. Baba, however changed this system and they are now carried ceremoniously placed in a palanquin. Haibat Baba laid his mortal coils in 1886. In memory of this great devotee, the first step leading to the temple is now venerated by the pilgrims. After visiting the temple of Lord Ganapati, one comes accross the Samadhi of the saint's sister, Muktabai. This was constructed in 1881 by the famous saint, Nrishimha Saraswati. Muktabai was the guru of Visoba Khechar, who himself was the guru of the eminent sage Namdeo.

Many Hindu festivals are celebrated at this place. The important ones are Ram Navmi, Hanuman Jayanti, Naag Panchami, Diwali, Gokul Ashtami, Ganapati Utsav and Maha Shiv Ratri. Thousands of pilgrims collect on such occasions. All in all, a visit to Alandi is really rewarding and is bound to show new spiritual horizons.

## SANT EKNATH MAHARAJ

Eknath Maharaj was born in 1533 A.D., nearly 250 years after Sant Dnyaneshwar. He was a great spiritual leader and also an eminent writer. In his compositions one has a feel of history. He was greatly devoted to the worship of Lord Dattatraya. He wrote both in Marathi and Sanskrit. He was a staunch follower of Sant Dnyaneshwar and Sant Namdev. His compositions were remarkable for a happy blend of the spiritual philosophy of Sant Dnyaneshwar and the devotional approach of Namdev. His gift to the posterity in the form of lyrical poetry is unmatched. His daughter's son Mukteshwar (born 1574 and died in 1640) was also a great poet and spiritual aspirant. His writings on his grandfather and spiritual mentor have shed great light on the life and work of Eknath. Mukteshwar had spent nearly twenty-five years in the company of his grand-father and as such had a personal and intimate knowledge about him.

Eknath was a great exponent of Bhagwat Dharma. He explained the monistic philosophy and the meaning of God both as manifest and unmanifest, the form and the formless, the one without a second, the one with all the attributes and the one attributeless. Eknath's writings are many and are famous for their lucidity and lyrical beauty. 'Eknathi Bhagwat' and 'Bhavarth Ramayan' are famous for their simplicity and spiritual content. Also well-known is 'Rukmini Swayambar'. Justin E. Abbott of Scottish Mission Industries, Pune has translated the twenty-third chapter of 'Eknathi Bhagwat' and has proved beneficial for those who do not understand Marathi and Sanskrit.

There is minor variation between the story of Lord Ram as narrated in Bhavarth Ramayan and in Valmiki's Ramayan. Eknath has also written 'Sankshipta Ramayan' i.e. a concise form of Ramayan. Bhavarath Ramayan in Marathi is the first attempt of its kind. It is a work that has brought out the versatility of the author. Devotion to Ram became very pronounced in Maharashtra after this book.

Sant Eknath Maharaj finished his earthly career in 1599 A.D.

## SANT NAMDEO

In the South many devotees are drawn towards Pandharpur, which is a city situated on the banks of Bhima or Bhimarathi. The God worshipped in the shrine is called Vithoba. The etymological meaning of this name is derived from the word 'Vishnu', which in Canarese language is called 'Vitthu'. The termination 'ba' or 'al', is suffixed to the name 'Vitthu' making it sound 'Vithoba' and 'Vitthal'. It is said that in 1249 A.D., a General of the ruling prince made a donation of the land surrounding 'Paundarik-kshetra', a holy place situated on the banks of river Bhima in the vicinity of the temple dedicated to the worship of Lord Vishnu. It is therefore, quite likely that the name is an alternative name for Pandharpur and the name of Vitthu was replaced by Vitthal or Vithoba. There is another theory also about the name of the town. Pandurang or Panduranga is also the name of Lord Shiva, whose temple then existed. It is therefore, doubtful whether the city derived its name from Pandurang or Shiva or Vishnu or Vittu and therefore, called Pandharpur. As time passed worship of Vishnu took precedence over that of Lord Shiva and the name Pandharpur became identical with Vishnu. There was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu called Paundarika. A legend has grown after him which is as under:

Pandharpur was surrounded by a dense forest by the name Dindirvana. There lived a man named Paundarika, who spent all his time in the service of his aged parents. Lord Krishna was extremely pleased by this devotion. His consort Rukmini once became angry with her Lord and came to Dindirvana, which was the modern site of Pandharpur. Lord Krishna became apprehensive on Rukmini's departure and searching for her also came to the same place where she was. He got reconciled soon with his consort. Both of them came to the hut where Paundarika was attending with extreme devotion to his old parents. Lord Krishna and Rukmini went to the hut, but Paundarika asked them to wait and threw a brick (in Marathi 'Veeth') and asked the Lord to stand

thercon and await his return. He went back to the service of his parents and the Lord along with His consort kept on waiting. The shrine that grew came to be called the shrine of 'Vithoba' or Vitthal standing on a brick. But all this seems mere fiction. In any case, Paundarika came to be identified with the worship of Vithoba or Vitthal which later spread to the whole of Maharashtra and had great followers like Namdeo and Tukaram. It is also significant that whereas Radha has been associated with Krishna during worship in the northern part of the country, Rukmini, the lawfully wedded wife of Krishna, came to be worshipped along with Lord Krishna in the southern part of the country. Namdeo was one such devotee as Vaishnavism in the Maratha country found many follows in the members of the Shudra and other lower communities, not that Brahmins and others did not worship Vishnu.

The family of Namdeo originally lived in a village called Narasi Vamani situated near Karhad of Satara district. It is now known by the name Bhaye-Narsinghpur. Namdeo belonged to the tailor caste. His father was called Dama Set and his mother was called Gonabai. The family migrated to Pandharpur where Namdev was born in 1270 A.D. He received ordinary education and showed little inclination towards his father's business, but he was a devout worshipper of Lord Vitthal. His guru was Visoba Khcchar. He did not believe in idol-worship. Namdev was called 'Nama' in his boyhood. Namdev's sister was called Aaubai. Though Namdev is regarded as a contemporary of Dnyaneshwar, Dr Bhandarkar, contests this and feels that Namdev must have come at least one century after the famous saint.

Namdev's wife was named Rajai. He had four sons and one daughter. His was an ordinary poor family. Dnyaneshwar took Samadhi in 1293 A.D. at Alandi. During his extensive travels, Namdev went to Punjab and remained there for nearly 18 years. In the Guru Granth Sahib in the 'Mukhbani', there are sixty-one compositions of Namdev, which are even today recited by the Sikhs with great veneration and respect. Namdev died in July 1350 at the door-steps of Vitthal Mandir.

## Namdev's Works

Namdev wrote in 'Abhangs'. He also wrote in Hindi. His collection of Abhangs, six in number, are famous even today. Many commentaries have been written on these as under:

1. Gharat Prat - This contains Abhangs describing his family and contemporary sages.
2. Gondhalakar Prat - This was written by Gondhalekar and published in Pune under the title 'Namdevachi Gatha'.
3. Jog Prat - This has been written by Shri Vishnu Narsingh Jog under the little 'Shri Namdevachya Gatha' and published from Pune.
4. Avate Prat - Written by Tryambak Hari Apte, published from Pune, which describes the lives of the family members of Namdev.
5. Gatha-Panchak or 'Sakal Sant Gatha' - Written by Nana Maharaj Sakhare and published from Pune.
6. Shri Namdev Gatha - Published by Maharashtra Government in 1970.

In addition to above many other works have come out bringing out the spiritual qualities of Namdev. As in the case of other saints, many legends have grown about Namdev and various life-sketches by different authors sometimes differ vitally. In the book written by Shri Tryambak Hari Apte (Indira Prakashan, Pune), under the title 'Namdev Maharaj Yanchi Abhang Chi Gatha' (Description of the Abhangas of Namdev Maharaj) at pages 600 to 623 are included the Hindi poems of Namdev. In twenty-four pages are given 102 compositions of Namdev. In his book, 'Namdev of Punjab' written by Shri S.P. Joshi, (Dhavale Prakashan, Bombay, 1940) 61 compositions, that have found a place in Guru Granth Sahib as 'Mukhbani', are given.

It would be useful to reproduce some of his Abhangas that throw light on Namdev's philosophy and thoughts:

"A stone-God never speaks. What is the possibility then of his removing the disease of mundane existence. A stone image is regarded as God, but the true God is wholly different. If a stone God fulfils desires, how is it that it breaks when struck. Those who adore a God of stone, lose everything through their folly. Those who say and hear that a God of stone speaks to his devotees, are both fools. Those who extol the greatness of such a God and call themselves as devotees, should be regarded as worthless people and their words should not be heard by the ear. If, by chiselling a stone, a god is made of it and is worshipped with care for many years, will he be of use at any time? Do reflect on this well in your mind. whether a holy place is large or small, there is no god but stone or water."

And again:

"The Veda has to speak by thy might, and the sun has to move round, such is the might of thee, the lord of the universe. Knowing this essential truth, I have surrendered myself to Him. By Thy might it is that the clouds have to pour down rain, mountains to rest firm, and the wind to blow. Nothing moves at all. O Lord Pandurang, thou art the cause of all."

"Your mind is full of vices. What is the use of the pilgrimages you made? What is the use of the austerities you practise, if there is no repentence? The sins resulting from a mental act cannot be effaced by the highest holy places. The essence of the matter is very simple. Sin is effaced by repentence."

"Vows, fasts and austerities are not at all necessary; nor is it necessary for you to go on a pilgrimage. Be you watchful in your hearts and always sing the name of Hari. It is not necessary to give up food or drinking water; fix your mind on the feet of Hari. Neither is it necessary for you to contemplate the One without a Second. Hold fast to the name of Hari and be firm in singing the name and then Pandurang will render Himself manifest to you."

"Recognise him alone as a righteous man who sees Vasudev in all objects, eradicating all pride of egoism. The rest are entangled in the shackles of delusion."

"To him all wealth is like earth and the nine species of gems are like mere stones. The two, desire and anger, he has thrown out and cherishes in his heart quietitude and forgiveness. He constantly repeats the name of Govinda not desisting even for a moment."

It will be seen that some of these thoughts merely echo the philosophy of Geeta. The language of Namdev is straight without mincing words and therefore, appeals to all. Here again are some other gems of thought:

"Firmly grasp the truth which is Narayan. Purity of conduct should not be abandoned; one should not be afraid of the censure of people and thus accomplish one's own purpose. Surrender yourself to your loving god, giving up all ostentation and pride. The censure of people should be regarded as praise and their praise not heeded. One should not entertain any longing for being praised or respected or honoured, but should nourish in oneself a liking for devotion. This should be rendered firm in the mind and the name of God should not be neglected even for a moment."

A translation of at least two of his verses enshrined in the 'Guru Granth Sahib', would be very illuminated:

"He is one (but) fills and encompasses many; wherever you look you find him there. There is scarcely one who understands him, all being deluded by the variegated picture drawn by Maya (delusive power). Everything is Govind, everything is Govinda, there is nothing without Govinda. Just as there is one thread and on it are woven breadthwise and lengthwise hundreds of thousands beads, so is everything woven in the Lord. The waves, the foam and the bubbles of water are not different from water. All this extent of universe is the sport of Parabrahma and, when we think of it, is not different from it. Illusive phantoms and the objects seen in dreams are regarded

as real. When by the instruction of my Guru my mind awoke, I accepted the truth. Reflecting in your mind, see this all to be creation of Hari. In the inside of everything there is one Murari alone without any interstice."

"The pitcher is filled and the water brought to bathe the god. There are forty-two hundreds of thousands of animals in it. There was already Vitthal in them. Whom shall I bathe? Wherever we go there is Vitthal and he ever sports in joy. Flowers have been brought and wreaths woven of them for worshipping God. First of all the flowers were smelt by the bees, there was Vitthal there; what shall I do? Milk has been brought and cooked for the offering of 'Khir' (a preparation of rice and milk sweetened by sugar) to God. The milk was first tasted by calf, in it was Vitthal. What shall I do? Here is Vitthal, there is Vitthal, there is no place without Vitthal. This place and that, Thou has filled O, Vihhal. Thou hast filled the whole world."

These hymns show the omnipresence of God. It is difficult to find another saint, who was so outspoken in his teachings. For this reason he has made a niche for himself in the hearts of all in Maharashtra and Punjab. The foursome to be always remembered and mentioned are Dhyancshwar, Tukaram, Ram Das and Namdev. They were all saints of the highest order. Namdev started the Varkari cult in Maharashtra.

Varkari Panth became very popular in Maharashtra, chiefly due to the inspiration given by Namdev and Tukaram. 'Panth' means 'the way'. The followers always went in a procession to Pandharpur with drums, cymbals and dumb-bells etc., shouting 'Pundarik Varda Hari Vitthal'. All the devotees had drunk deep the nectar of devotion of Vitthal. Pandharpur was the holiest of places for them and the temple the biggest sanctuary.

It is very rare that a poet has given his autobiographical sketch in his writings, specially when written in verses. Not so with Namdev. In the temple of Nagnath, sprouted the seeds of devotion and from that moment a radical change

came in his outlook towards life and his deep devotion towards Vitthal grew. All this has been described by Namdev himself. Inspiration, detachment towards worldly things, passionate longing for God and a feeling of complete surrender and dependence towards Providence and his Adwait philosophy or monism have all been described beautifully by Namdev himself.

Rajai, Namdev's wife, was in the beginning not reconciled towards this change in Namdev. All this has been brought out in the 'abhangas' by Namdev. Gonabai was his mother and Dama Set his father. Both time and again reprimanded Namdev to look after the tailor's profession. His wife Rajai was equally distressed. In his 'Abhangas' Namdev has unfolded this moving story without concealing anything. And here lies the beauty of his compositions. They are transparently true and honest and therefore, appeal straight to the heart. In the first part, there are 41 abhangas that describe vividly the early tensions, opposition from the family. This part also deals with his contacts with Nivrittinath, Dhyaneshwar, Sopandev and Muktai, the sister. Nivrittinath and Dhyaneshwar welcomed him with folded hands and this created egoistic feelings in Namdev. He had to fight these thoughts, when he realised how small he was. In this connection, Mukta Bai, Dhyaneshwar's sister, played an important part in arousing in him sentiments of pity and devotion.

The second part consists of 12 abhangas. Under Dhyandev's inspiration, Namdev undertook visits to holy places. This chapter also describes a meeting between Dhyaneshwar and Namdev. The language is very moving. The third part consists of 59 abhangas. Namdev shows how he underwent change in consequence of his exposure to Dhyaneshwar. When he describes his mental condition, one cannot remain unaffected. Namdev looked upon Vitthal as his mother. He implores Him like a child. There are in all ten parts and going through them is like climbing step by step leading the reader to the deep and sublimest mystical thoughts.

## MANIK PRABHU

In Maharashtra and other Marathi-speaking areas, there is a popular belief that Lord Dattatraya has incarnated either fully or partially in the form of certain well-known saints. How this belief came to exist or what is its reason is difficult to explain. But one such saint in whom the Lord manifested fully is Manik Prabhu.

In the old state of Nizam, the three historically important districts were Bedar, Kalyan and Gulbarga. They formed a triangle and the area was known as Daripatti. In the western part of this area the language spoken was Marathi. From the town of Kalyan at a distance of about ten Kms, there was a village known as Panchhal. It was surrounded by dense forests all round in the midst of which existed a temple dedicated to the worship of Hanuman or Maruti. The icon of the monkey-god was huge and fierce looking. The eyes were deep and penetrating and none would look at them without feeling a shiver of horror. The worshippers were as such forced to look at the feet only. After evening none dared to approach the temple, much less to remain there at night. There was a huge metal lamp, called Nanda Deep, which burnt and shed an eerie light all round. The statue looked more frightening because of all this. The God was addressed as Panchhaleshwar Maruti.

One evening a traveller entered this temple. Night was setting in and the visitor took off all his clothes and made a bundle and then kept it on the head of the God. He took away his foot-wear also and placed it on the top of this bundle. After this, he quietly retired into a corner and was fast asleep after some time. In the morning the priests, whose duty was to clean the temple and perform the morning puja, came and had the shock of their lives when they saw a bundle of clothes on the God's head with shoes on top of it. They removed the articles immediately and felt that the person who desecrated the temple in this manner must be close by, since the bundle contained his clothes. Soon they saw a

man sleeping in a corner lying huddled. They rudely shook him and brought him out of the temple and gave him a terrific beating for defiling the image of their God. The person thus treated, never uttered a word or begged pardon. The priests went inside and found that the gorgeous apparel used as wear of the God's image was missing and coming out they found that it was on the body of the person who had been battered and beaten by them. Not only that, there were marks of whips on the body of the God's statue. The priests became alarmed. In the meantime some more persons including the village dignitaries, arrived and when they saw the man, so inhumanly manhandled, they all exclaimed, "Why, this is Manik Prabhu! You fools! What have you done?" The priests were struck with fear, because the name of Manik Prabhu as an eminent saint was well known. They fell at his feet and implored his pardon. But Prabhu said that there was nothing wrong. When he came in the evening, fearing that his clothes may be burgled at night, he decided to entrust them to the care of the Lord for safe custody.

This is his life story:

Manoharpant Harkude and his wife Bayamma were extremely god-fearing. They lived in the town Kalyan and spent all their time in performing oblations to God and in prayers. They were frequent visitors to Nizam's Durbar and it can be presumed that their financial position was satisfactory. Though as a couple they were happy, but they had no children and pined for one. The first child, a son was born and was named Hanumant, after Maruti, the monkey-god. In the year 1817 A.D., Bayamma went to her parent's house for confinement and gave birth to another son, brilliant like jewel and as such was named 'Manik' or precious stone. The month was Margsheesh, i.e. December, and the day was Chaturthi of the bright moon. A third son was born after ten years i.e. 1827, and he was named Nrishimh.

After the death of Manoharpant, his wife Bayamma went to live with her brother where the children were brought up. Manik was a precocious child. He did not apply his mind to

studies, but even at that tender age, he gave evidence of possessing many miraculous powers much to the astonishment of his play-mates. One such incident may be mentioned. Among his playmates was a boy named Govinda. When Manik went to call him and play, his parents were crying and informed him that Govinda was dead. "No", said Manik, "Just call him loudly." And when they did so, Govinda got up, as if from sleep, much to the delight and surprise of his parents. The news spread like wild fire in the town and throngs of visitors came to greet Govinda's parents and pay their homage to Manik.

There were many such incidents. While the boys were out to play, a woman selling mangoes passed by. When hailed by the boys, she did not stop. Manik then casually observed, "Since, she wants children, she will stop." And she did stop on hearing these words, because she wondered how this boy had come to know that she had no children. She came back to the boys and said, "Take as many mangoes as you like." The boys had a feast. Manik said that he had picked up eleven mangoes, and she would beget the same number of children. The lady had five children after this and then came back to Manik and implored him to restrict the number. Manik said, "Your wish. Let that be as you wish. I am released from my word."

There was a high Government official at Hyderabad. They were Brahmins. Bhimabai was the wife's name and she was much distressed, because they had no children. She heard that in Kalyan that there was a half-mad boy, whose words were prophetic. She decided to see this boy and proceeded towards Kalyan. When she was near her destination, she found that some boys were playing and one boy had been pinned down. She had a big retinue of soldiers and attendants with her. She stopped and bade her soldiers to go and rescue the boy. But the boy replied, "Please go away. The elders should not interfere when boys are playing or quarrelling." The soldiers returned to their mistress, but they heard the boy stating that, "If someone gave me eight pennies, I will give him one child for a penny." The lady heard these words and looked for some one who could give her pennies. While still deliberating over the situation where to

find the pennies, she saw a half-clad man going about with his clothes decorated with pennies. He easily gave her the required pennies and the same were given to the boy. When the whole party came to Kalyan and looked for the boy, who was said to be an incarnation of Lord Dattatraya, she was amazed to find that it was none other than the boy who had asked for pennies. Bhimabai was deeply impressed by the radiance of the boy's face and returned home quite pleased and contented. She was aware of the coming event when she soon afterwards became pregnant and was blessed with a son.

Manik Prabhu had no desire for formal studies and his maternal uncle was greatly distressed on this account. Manik was now sixteen and the uncle felt that he should take up some vocation. One day on his return, he found Manik stretched comfortably on his bed and the uncle scolded him as a good for nothing person and living as a parasite on others. Manik took these insulting words to his heart and decided to quit the house. He told his uncle that he was leaving the house and would no longer depend on him for support. Manik Prabhu left Kalyan and his uncle. About ten kms away, was a village called Mandal. Amritkund or Avilkund, as it is known today, is a holy place of pilgrimage. Many temples, caves and other secluded places are there, where hermits retire for meditation. Manik Prabhu after his morning bath in Avilkund would retire to one of these caves and become lost in deep meditation. The chief Clerk of Mandal village saw this boy once with only a strip of cloth covering his loins and his body and forehead smeared with holy ash. His face beamed with spiritual radiance. His relatives soon came to know about his place of concealment and came to Mandal and persuaded him to return home. But Manik Prabhu remained there while scores of devotees came everyday for offering him presents in the form of fruits and small cash. Manik Prabhu's real life commenced from this point. People in increasing numbers came to visit him for the solution of their various problems. Some had no children, or suffered from serious physical deformities and some were facing a financial crisis. They all looked to Manik Prabhu for support and help, which they all received at his hands.

Mailar is known as 'Dakshin Kashi', i.e. Varanasi of the South. There came a lady by the name Vyakamma. She was young, well shaped with a comely appearance. She came for Prabhu's darshan and would not move even after everyone had left. Prabhu asked her to go away, if she had received 'prasad'. But the lady said, "Sir, I do not know where my house is or my people. I must remain here always and for ever in your presence." But Manik Prabhu advised her to go away as she was young and wearing many and costly ornaments. The lady decided to take off all the ornaments. But Manik Prabhu persuaded her to go away. Once Prabhu sent her word to come as soon as possible in whatever condition she was. She was wearing no clothes then and preparing for a bath, but hearing the Master's command she rushed to his presence in the same condition. Manik Prabhu was aghast to see her in that condition and threw at her his own white shawl to cover her naked body. From that moment Vyakamma began to wear only white clothes and then continued to remain near her Master with a rosary in her hand and always lost in deep meditation.

Manik Prabhu left the place soon. Accompanied by his disciples he left for visiting various holy places like Tuljapur, Pandharpur etc. and then came down to Pune. He then went to Girnar, Gangotri, Haridwar, Badri, Kedar, Prayag, Kashi and Jagannathpuri. He then came to Gangapur. As the crowds desirous of having his darshan began to swell, he came back to Kalyan. Prabhu's followers were drawn from all castes and professions. Muslims also were amongst them and when some of them tried to put hindrance in his way, they were the victims of divine wrath and soon gave up their evil ways. Prabhu remained at Bedar for two months and then came down to Humnabad. Once the place was famous and was called Jaisinghpur. His followers purchased land in this area and the place came to be called Maniknagar. Manik Prabhu received visitors and followers while residing here. The hall, where he gave audience in the course of time, was well decorated and fitted in a right royal manner. The floor was covered with costly carpets and the walls were hung with tapestry etc. As soon Manik Prabhu would enter this hall, all the visitors would stand up in a respectful manner.

and take their seats only after Prabhu had done so. Sometimes there would be gay and merry sessions of dance and music in this hall. There would be discourses on Vedantic subjects. Manik prabhu would distribute food, clothes and other articles of necessities to the needy. There was no dearth of gifts made by the devotees and both cash and kind flowed in an unending manner. Maniknagar became like a capital of a kingdom and devotees from far and wide came there.

Many tales of Manik Prabhu's miracles and occult powers have been chronicled. When his end was coming, he called his chosen ones and informed them about his intended departure from this world. The chosen ones were his mother Bayamma Devi, her son Dada Maharaj, another brother Tatya Maharaj and Vyakamma Devi, the lady in white who had surrendered her entire life to Prahu's service. After Datta Jayanti and general public feasting were over, Manik Prabhu took Samadhi, amidst chanting of Lord's name. Manik Prabhu is a bright jewel in the spiritual hierarchy of Maharashtra.

## SAMARTH SHRI RAMDAS SWAMI

For Maharashtrians in general and Marathi-speaking persons particularly, 'Samarth Ram Das' is a house-hold name. His contribution to Maharashtra during his life-time and afterwards has been immense. His name is included in the triumverate of saints viz., Dnyaneshwar Ramdas and Tukaram. In some ways, he even surpasses the other two saints, because of the impact he had made on the current history through his disciple Shivaji Maharaj. His life was as spectacular as the career of his eminent pupil-hero. He was not merely a learned scholar and writer, but was also endowed with keen political acumen. He enthused his pupil to build a mighty Maratha empire and fight against the oppressive policies of the Mughal emperor. It is now widely accepted that Shivaji Maharaj consulted his Guru before taking any major decision and was always guided by his wise counsels.

Ram Das, originally named Narayan, was the second son, the eldest being Gangadhar Pant. Narayan was born on an auspicious day viz. Chaitra Shudh Navami 1608 A.D. to a pious Brahmin couple, Suryaji Pant and Ranidevi. His birth-day coincided with the birthday of Lord Ram, whose devotee he became later on. Sant Eknath, who was a great saint of his times, declared on seeing the boy that he was the great devotee Hanuman, monkey-god reborn. Narayan was a precocious child and was fond of swimming, climbing trees and other pranks befitting his age. But he was very intelligent and could grasp and understand things very easily. When he was only five, a learned Pandit was appointed to teach the two brothers Vedas and Shastras. Shortly after the Upnayan ceremony of Narayan, Suryaji Pant passed away.

Narayan was of a very contemplative nature and would often retire to a remote corner of the house or under a tree and become lost in meditation. His mother Ranidevi, who had now to look after the boys, was very perplexed at this strange behaviour of her son and would ask him if any thing

was wrong with him. But the boy would say, "I was contemplating on the mystery of life and this world." He entreated his elder brother to initiate him into the mysteries of spiritual life, but the latter refused saying that Narayan was too young. Gangadhar Pant was already married and so Ranudevi thought that Narayan should also be tied in nuptial knots and he would become normal. So a girl was selected. Narayan refused point-blank and said that since his elder brother was already married, there would be children and the family would go on. But the mother was adamant and took a promise from her son that after marriage, Narayan might do whatever he liked.

Marriage preparations were made and the groom's Barat went to the village Asan, where the girl lived. It is customary to hold a piece of cloth, duly decorated with a 'Swastik' emblem, between the bride and bride-groom when sacramental mantras are chanted. The priest declares in a loud voice, "Shubh Lagna Sawadhan", meaning the auspicious moment has come. Now be alert everybody. Everybody includes the two who are going to be married. As soon as Ramdas heard the exhortation, "Sawadhan", he realised that the moment had come to be careful and became wide awake. He left the place and ran away followed by his relatives, but he was nowhere to be found. He remained for four to five days in the village itself and then left towards Nasik and remained at Panchwati near Godavari river. This place is redolent with the incidents of the great epic Ramayan. It was here that Sita was kidnapped by Ravana. There was a village called 'Takali' near by, and Ramdas entered one of the caves and was lost in deep meditation. He remained there for some twelve years. He would stand in Godavari river praying to Lord Ram and then return to the cave and became absorbed in 'Tapasya' or spiritual austerities. In the noon he would return to Panchwati and solicit food, just enough to support him.

By strong will power and rigid observance of spiritual routine, he developed many qualities of determination and purpose. A legend has grown round him while he was here. Once a rich man Agnihotri, belonging to another nearby village 'Kosavar', died of tuberculosis. The dead body was

carried for cremation. The funeral crowd included the mourning wife, who had decided to immolate herself on her husband's funeral pyre and was as such bedecked with jewellery and other colourful attire. Swami Ramdas, little realising the gravity of the occasion, gave the usual blessings, "Ashta-putra Saubhagyavati Bhava", i.e. 'May your husband live long and may you get eight children'. When he was told that she had been widowed, he took some Godavari water in his palm and prayed to the Lord and then sprinkled the water on the corpse. Life returned and Agnihotri came back to life.

After remaining near Panchvati for twelve years, Ram Das left the place to begin his pilgrimage of the holy places in the country. He went to Kashi, Prayag, Ayodhya, Mathura, Vrindavan, Prabhas, Dwarka and then to Srinagar in Kashmir. From there he went to Badrinath, Kedarnath and the famous Mansarovar Lake. From there he came back to the South and visited Jagannath Puri, Rameshwaram, Lanka and other places of pilgrimage. After visiting Pandharpur, he returned to Panchvati. Swami Ram Das was instrumental in getting temples constructed and dedicated to the worship of Lord Ram or Hanuman and appointed responsible persons to look after their upkeep. His spiritual powers were greatly developed and he came to be recognised as a leading spiritual personality. The prefix 'Samarth' meaning 'all-powerful' was conferred on him. His call was always, "Jaya Jaya Raghuvir Samarth".

During his wanderings throughout the entire length and breadth of the country, he often spent his time with holy men. He benefitted from their company and gave benefit to those who listened to him. During his extensive travels he saw the pathetic condition of Hindus as a result of their servility towards their Muslim rulers. They had become completely demoralised and were a disunited and disorganised people without any genuine leader who could inspire faith and loyalty.

During these journeys, when he was near Paithan, he came to know that his mother and elder brother were

extremely worried over his continued absence. His mother had become partially blind due to continued crying. Ramdas therefore, decided to visit them. When he reached the house, he shouted clearly his usual refrain, 'Jaya Jaya Raghuvir Samarth'; his mother asked her daughter-in-law to give alms to the hermit. When the lady came out, she failed to recognise her husband's brother. Samarth Ram Das said he was not a Sadhu who would go back. This time his mother recognised his voice and came out running and fell into his arms saying, "My son, I am almost blind and I cannot even see your face. But how grown up you have become." Samarth fell at her feet and by his divine touch restored her eyesight. When his elder brother came, Samarth gave him due respects. All found a spiritual glow on his face. His countenance beamed with a radiant light. Samarth Ram Das stayed with the family for some days, but again left on his missionary travels. He consoled his mother and counselled her to repose her faith in Lord Ram as his purpose in life was service to humanity and their uplift. From the village Jhamb, he again came to Panchvati and then to Takali, Mahabaleshwar and then to places near Krishna river. He installed an icon of Lord Ram and exhorted everyone to offer puja regularly. From there, he sojourned to Mahuli and remained there giving spiritual discourses. Wherever he went, he established temples and other spiritual centres. In this manner he had established nearly seven hundred temples and spiritual centres throughout the country.

Sant Tukaram was a contemporary of Samarth Ram Das and was a great spiritual leader in his own right. Maharaj Shivaji went to him and begged to be initiated by the saint. But Tukaram Maharaj said, "Someone else has to be your Guru. Please go to Samarth Ram Das, who will initiate you and accept you as his disciple." But where to find Samarth? He never stayed at one place. Finally, Shivaji saw the master sitting under a tree. Samarth was at that time reading the letter Shivaji had sent him requesting for interview. Samarth Ram Das agreed to accept Shivaji as his disciple and formally initiated him. From that moment Shivaji seemed to acquire added strength to carry out his mission, which was to free Hindus from the yoke of thralldom. Shivaji received

great help and support from various centres dotted all over the country by Samarth Ram Das. Samarth remained at Chaphal for most of the time. Amongst thousands of his disciples, the chief disciple was Kalyan Swami. Before his initiation by the Master, he was called Ambaji. He was the nephew of the Governor of Karvir, Shri Paraji Pant. His mother had come to Samarth Ram Das with her two sons. Samarth accepted Ambaji as his disciple and always kept him by his side as his chief disciple and scribe.

Once during 1665, Samarth along with his retinue of disciples reached the outskirts of Satara. At the gates of the famous fort, he called out loudly, 'Jaya Jaya Raghuveer Samarth'. Shivaji, who was at that time inside the fort, heard this refrain and came out and welcomed his Master. Once inside the fort, Shivaji prepared an endowment form and bequeathed his entire kingdom to his Master. Samarth was highly pleased at this gesture. Samarth said that it was not his purpose to rule a kingdom and Shivaji must now rule and govern as the representative of his Master. Shivaji then took the foot-wear of his Master and declared that he would install them on the throne and rule on their behalf. Shivaji always remembered this and his monumental success as a maker of history goes to the Master, who had trained him for the purpose.

Shivaji died in 1685. Samarth Ramdas grieved immensely at the loss of this precious jewel. Samarth and Shivaji were complimentary to each other. Though Samarth was a complete recluse, he felt the loss of Shivaji immensely. It was his design to establish an independent state of Hindus. Shivaji had been selected to accomplish his cherished dream. After Shivaji's death, Samarth stopped going out and confined himself to his cottage spending his time in meditation and thoughts of Lord Ram. He also felt greatly disappointed at the strange and irresponsible behaviour of Shambhaji, Shivaji's successor. His counsels to Shambhaji had no effect. Samarth realised that after the demise of Shivaji, his end was also near. He went to Chaphal and participated in the festival of Ram Navami, Lord Ram's birthday and then returned to Sajjangarh. He gave up all solid food and

remained on milk only. He gave up this also from Pratipada, the first day of bright-moon. He appointed efficient persons to administer the Ashrams and organised other spiritual activities. His spirit merged with the Divine on Navami, the ninth day of the month of Magh, bright moon.

Thus ended the earthly life of one of the greatest spiritual leaders of India. He has left a very rich legacy for generations to follow. His faith in the resurgence of India was unshakeable. Samarth Ram Das was not only a great saint and social reformer, he was a great poet and writer as well. He wrote extensively and some of his works are immortal in the sense that the teachings are universal. His two outstanding works are '*Mana-Chhe-Shloka*' and '*Das-Bodh*'. Besides these two, he also wrote '*Choudah-Shatak*', '*Jana-Swabhav*', '*Gosavi*', '*Panch-Samadhi*', '*Junat Purush Manas Puja*', '*Juna Das Bodhram Geeta*' and many others. But '*Mana Chhe Shloka*' meaning 'poems addressed to the mind' and '*Das-Bodh*' are really superb. Many stanzas of these have become household sayings and are freely quoted like the poems of Tulsi Das' '*Ram Charit Manas*'. But in their form they are shorter and epigrammatic.

It cannot be said with certainty when '*Das Bodh*' was written. In the sixth chapter of this work, it is said that 4760 years have elapsed since Kaliyuga began. This points to the time being 1660 A.D. Some say that it was written when Samarth was living in a cave. Some contest this view and say that it was completed shortly before Samarth took his Samadhi. It is however, accepted that the work is saturated with spiritual teachings. The book consists of twenty chapters and leads the reader from elementary knowledge of the world to the highest regions of sublimated thoughts. A very lucid translation in Hindi by Padmashri Babu Ram Chandra Verma is now available and can be understood by the non-Marathi speaking people. The book deals with the basic philosophy of life. He tells us of the unity and oneness of life in dealing with fellow beings. We must cultivate compassion and love towards one another. God alone is real and eternal. Other things are merely illusory and transient. '*Manache Shlok*', an appeal to the mind contains valuable precepts.

Here are some:

- (i) One must give up whatever is not liked by the people and whatever is liked or approved should be practised.
- (ii). O Mind, give up evil thoughts and evil desires. Keep your mind in harmony and divorced from thoughts of sin.
- (iii) O Mind, when the body is left behind, only good name should remain behind. One must live with these thoughts and aim in life.
- (iv) Who can say that he is really happy in this world? O discerning mind, make a search of yourself to verify this truth.
- (v) O Mind, all your life you have taken pains to preserve this body and yet when the end came, you were powerless.

The work consists of 205 shlokas. It is difficult to make a selection, because every shloka is like a pearl in a necklace. There are persons in Maharashtra who have memorised all the shlokas and quote them profusely as suitable to the occasion. Another work of importance is 'Karunashtake', which is an yearning addressed to God. They touch the core of the heart. Once again, every shloka is a master-piece and contains eternal precepts. In his writings he has exhorted man to be eternally vigilant and in his 'Sadhana', to practise 'Sawadhan', i.e. vigilance and perseverance, 'Anutap and Uparitim' i.e. penitence and recoil from worldly obsessions, 'Ekanta' or solitude, Pure Knowledge and Atma-Nivedan.

In the end, it must be said that Samarth Swami Shri Ram Das is one of the brightest stars in the spiritual firmament of India. It is rarely given to a Master to fuse religion and politics into one. But such was the work of this unique Master.

## SANT TUKARAM

There is a poem which reads as under:

Dnandeva laid the foundation,  
 Namdeo raised the walls,  
 Eknath put up the roof and,  
 Tukaram built the temple dome (Kalas),  
 Thus arose the mighty edifice of the  
 Spiritual culture of Maharashtra.

Tukaram was indeed one of the brightest stars on the firmament of spiritual light that shone from Maharashtra. He was born in 1598 A.D. at Dehu near Pune. The name of the family was More. It was a family of Maratha caste, which may have sprung from Kshatriyas, but was at that time considered Shudra caste. His biographer Mahipati writes that he became bankrupt when (he died in 1640 A.D.) he was only fourty-two years old.

Seven of Tukaram's ancestors were devotees of Vithoba and made regular pilgrimages to Pandharpur, but then a temple was built in Dehu itself dedicated to the worship of Vithoba and Rukmani. Tukaram's father was named Bolhoji. He was a petty trader. When Bolhoji grew old, he wanted to hand over the business to his eldest son Savji, but Savji had no interest in worldly matters. The business was therefore, handed over to Tukaram, who was then thirteen years of age. Tukaram managed the affairs somehow till he was seventeen when his father died. The business affairs got into disorder as Tukaram was too simple and got into debts.

Tukaram was married to a girl, who was of a sickly constitution and after sometime he married another girl, named Ava, who was the daughter of a well to do family of Pune. In a famine he lost his first wife and son Santu, being "unable to bear travails and hunger." His bullocks also died and he ran into debts. He had to sell the little bit of land that he owned. His wife Ava however, procured a loan for him and

his affairs were put back into order. He had to go out in connection with his business. Once he was returning after making immense profit. On the way he met a person, who was being whisked away by his creditors for his failure to pay back the loan. Moved by compassion, Tukaram gave away all that he possessed and thus secured the release of the afflicted person. He returned home empty-handed.

Misfortune again overtook him in the shape of a famine that plagued the land. Tukaram made up his mind to renounce the business. But his brother Kanhya protested. Tukaram then divided all the property in two parts, gave to his brother his legitimate share, collected all papers establishing his share and threw them into the river. From this moment, he spent all his time in singing the Lord's praise. He spent days at the top of the nearby hillocks in Dehu and the nights in the temple of the town. He composed songs in Marathi in the metre known as 'Abhang'. These 'Abhangas' have become household quotes in Maharashtra, because of the deep mystical truths contained. Tukaram performed 'Keertans', i.e. stories taken from the Puranic legends or the epics 'Ramayan' and 'Mahabharat', set in musical tunes which made them extremely popular. His discourses on spiritual matters were also full of his 'Abhangas'. Some of his abhangas were written by him and some others were taken down by his followers and many were lost. There are two such pieces printed in Bombay, one containing 4621 pieces and the other 8441.

This overwhelming popularity of Tukaram created a number of enemies also, because during his keertans at Dehu, Pune and Lohegaon and other nearby places people collected in large numbers to listen to him. By his ecstatic singing he captured the love and affection of his listeners. His opponents, therefore, specially one Rameshwari Bhat, started vilification against him. He branded Tukaram's 'abhangas' as sacrilegious and against the spirit of Vedas and Shastras. Tukaram being a Shudra by caste, had no right to preach or compose Abhangas, according to his opponents. Rameshwari caused all his writing and Abhangas to be thrown into the river Indrayani, so that "they would no longer be able to defile any longer and corrupt people's mind."

Tukaram, who had been reduced to utter pauperity having lost his business, became frustrated due to the loss of his spiritual treasures. He had no desire to live any longer and sat on the banks of the river chanting Lord's name, 'Pandurang', 'Pandurang'. His wife and children also joined in the fast. It was on the fifteenth day that a miracle happened. Before the astonished gaze of the towns-people, the manuscripts containing his abhangas and other writings surfaced to the top of the waters of the river and glided gently towards the shore. While the people rushed to get hold of the manuscripts, it is said that Tukaram had a vision of the Lord Himself. His smiles and benevolent looks soothed Tukaram's heart. Tukaram said, "Oh Lord forgive me for all the accusations I made against you in my hour of desperation." In the meantime, people rejoiced at this miracle, shouted praise for Tukaram and hailed him as a saint and realised person.

His chief opponent Rameshwari Bhat continued his campaign of vilification. He was struck down by high fever and went to Alandi to pray at the Samadhi of Sant Dnyaneshwar, who appeared to him in a dream and asked him to seek pardon from Tukaram himself. Rameshwari Bhat did accordingly. Tukaram bore no malice towards anyone, much less towards those who had maligned him. He embraced Rameshwari Bhat and said, "Don't grieve. Vithoba is merciful and cares for everyone." Rameshwari Bhat was moved to tears at this magnanimity. Tukaram's mere touch had brought about a miracle, all his physical pains immediately disappeared and he became an ardent devotee of Tukaram afterwards. He kept a record of Tukaram's all Abhangas and the posterity thus owes him a gratitude. Tukaram's fame spread far and wide and he was acknowledged as one of the greatest saints of the land. The Maratha chieftain Shivaji also heard about him and sent him his messengers along with rich treasures. Tukaram was not at home when the gifts arrived. His wife and children were overjoyed at this, because they thought that their poverty was now at an end. When Tukaram returned, he was stunned at seeing these gifts as if bitten by a cobra. He politely asked the messengers to take away the gifts. Vitthal was his greatest treasure.

When Shivaji heard about this, he was greatly impressed. He came to meet him and requested that he be accepted as his disciple. Tukaram however, said, "I cannot be your Guru. Someone else has to be sought. Please go to Sant Ramdas. He will initiate you. Much work has to be done under his guidance." There is an interesting story about Shivaji and Tukaram. During one of the Keertans, the audience was sitting enraptured. Shivaji was also there. His enemies however, got a scent of his presence and surrounded the whole gathering with a view to capture him. When Tukaram became aware of this danger, he prayed to Vitthal to come to his rescue. How could he face anyone if while chanting Lord's name, death overtook them. He himself was not afraid of death, but he was greatly concerned about the safety of others. It is said that the Lord assumed the form of Shivaji and the captors were thus misled and left the place in the hope that the prisoner had been taken. The real Shivaji thus remained unharmed.

In 1650 A.D., Tukaram died leaving behind him a rich legacy to his countrymen in the form of thousands of Abhangas which he had composed. It would be interesting to give here a few of them to show their spiritual richness:

"If the mind is pure, then verily even enemies become friends. Neither tigers nor serpents can cause any hurt to the pure-minded. Poison will become nectar. A blow will be turned into help."

In another Abhang he says, "By repentance, I am now remembering you. Happy am I that my wife is termagant and that I have lost all reputation and am not respected by any. I have now come as suppliant to Thce."

In another 'Abhang' he says: "I have composed poetry according to my light. Good or bad only God knows, for it is His own handiwork. I extricate myself from egoism, throw my entire burden upon God and rest content."

Singing the glory of the Lord, he says:

"Let my mind go after the name of God and let me sing His praises. My early life was embittered by calamities.

but His name gave me comfort. The happiness that I derived by meditation on the Name was incomparable. The impersonal look on a Form, I found that God runs to the place where the Name is celebrated. Make haste to sing the praise of God. Everything else leads to sorrow. From the disbelievers in the Name, God stands at a distance."

Tukaram was a monotheist in a sense and condemns even the worship of other Gods and Goddesses like Jakhat and even Bhairav or Ganpati and of ghosts and goblins. He was a keen worshipper of Pandurang or Vithoba and His consort. He says, "Sesamum seeds and grains of rice thou burnt by throwing into fire, but desire and anger are as mischievous as before, Why hast thou taken trouble in vain giving up the adoration of Pandurang." Tukaram thus condemns religious practices which concern the body alone and mere mechanical rites such as giving oblations. He recommends the necessity of striving for the attainment of spiritual virtue and of devotion to God. Though he himself worshipped an idol, he had always before him the great Lord of the universe as the following abhang says:

"The greatness is unsearchable. Even the Vedas became silent and the power of the mind becomes stunned. What possibility is there of my mental power reaching Him, whose light is that which illuminates the sun and the moon. Even one thousand-tongued (the great serpent) is unable to expound Thy greatness, then how shall I be able to do so?" Says Tuka, "We are Thy children. Thou art our mother, peace be under the shadow (Protection) of Thy grace." And again, "All the world says that there is not a space so minute as a sesamum seed without Thee. The old Rishis, sages, other pious men and holy men said Thou art in the heart of all these things... Thou hast filled up numberless universes and also a residue still remained. But to me Thou hast become inaccessible." Further he says, "God is ours, certainly ours, and is the soul of all souls. God is not far to us, certainly near, outside and inside. God is benign and fulfills every longing even those who merely long. God protects us

and subdues strife and death. God is merciful and protects all."

It is difficult to reproduce a translation of all his abhangas. He was a Bhakta or devotee, but his devotion transcended narrow parochial thoughts. For him God's immanence was there for anyone to see who could see. He had reached a very high state of spiritual perfection. See what he says:

"I have seen my own death with my eyes. The result is incomparable happiness. The three worlds are filled with joy. And I have enjoyed as the soul of all. By my sense of individuality, I was confined to one place and by its abandonment I have become all-reaching. I am free from the littleness resulting from the feeling of you and I. Narayan has now given me a place to live; putting my faith in Him I have remained at His feet. The fulfilment of what I undertook, I have manifested in the world".

Some of his sayings are now as freely quoted on the desired occasion as are 'chaupais' of Tulsidas in North India. One such would merit mention: "Tuka mhane, ugi raha. Je je hoi, te te paha". Tukaram says, "Keep your thoughts and passions. Remain steadfast and just watch impersonally whatever is happening."

## SANT BAHINA BAI

The year was 1628 A.D. Au Ji was a poor Brahmin living in the village Devgaon situated on the banks of river Shiva. According to a popular legend, the renowned Rishi Agastya had given his blessings to the place and it was said that anyone doing 'tapasya' on the banks of the river would be granted his wish. Au Ji's wife was named Janaki Bai. They were an extremely devoted couple, but had no children to make their happiness complete. The couple observed great austerities on the banks of the river. Janaki Bai had a dream, repeated three times when a pious Brahmin appeared and blessed her and said that she would bear three children, two sons and a daughter. In 1628, a daughter was born who was named Bahina Bai. An astrologer, Vishweshwar cast her horoscope and predicted that the child would earn name and fame.

According to then prevailing custom, Bahina's betrothal took place when she was just four. The bride-groom was Gangadhar Pathak, who was thirty years old and was a distant relative of Auji Kulkarni. There was some family dispute over property matters and the family along with Gangadhar Pathak were forced to leave the village. They had many sufferings during their journey and had to beg alms for support. During their wanderings, they visited many places of holy repute. Bahina was enchanted when she arrived at such places and wanted to settle down there. Eventually they reached Pandharpur, the renowned place of sacred memories in Maharashtra. The family visited the Vithoba temple and Bahina was lost in reverent mood on beholding the Lord's idol. Finally they came to Rahimatpur and settled down there.

Gangadhar was appointed as the priest of the village and for the time being, their problems were solved. Bahina was then eleven years old. She had a natural inclination towards Sadhus, saints and she would spend her time listening to the tales about the glory of the Lord. While the other girls

were busy playing and gossiping. Bahina was seen sitting and lost in meditation. The regular priest, vice whom Gangadhar was working, returned from his trip to Kashi and so Gangadhar was again without a job. The family had to leave Rahimatpur and they came to Kolhapur. At Kolhapur, there lived a pious Brahmin, Bahiram Bhatt. He gave shelter to the family. Holy scriptures like 'Purana' and 'Bhagwati' were regularly recited in his house. Jayaramswami, a reputed saint, gave discourses on 'Bhagwati' and so Bahina felt that her life's desires were fulfilled.

Once Bahiram Bhatt received a beautiful cow as a gift. The horns and legs were decorated with costly silken cloth. Bahiram Bhatt gifted the cow to Gangadhar. The cow had a beautiful calf and Bahina became extremely fond of it. The calf was so devoted to Bahina that he would not accept even water from any other person and went along with Bahina wherever she went. When she was attending Keertans or spiritual discourses, the calf invariably accompanied her. Jayaram Swami was a famous Keertankar and huge gatherings listened in rapturous attention. So Bahina Bai also went there.

Bahina Bai and the calf became a talk of the town, which displeased Gangadhar. Once he was so furious that on coming home he caught Bahina Bai by her hair and gave her a good beating. Bahina's parents could not understand this attitude of their son-in-law and enquired what was wrong and Gangadhar replied that she had no business to go and listen to Keertans of Jayaramswami. If she went again, she would get another severe beating. From that time, this went off and on. Bahiram Bhatt took Gangadhar to task for this inhuman behaviour and asked him to leave the house, if he could not improve his manners. In the meantime, the calf fell ill and inspite of good treatment and care, it died. Bahina felt extremely desolate and did not take food or water for three days. Then at night, she saw a pious Brahmin advising her to get up and understand things and take to spiritual path for which she was destined. Bahina got up and thought that the Brahmin looked like Pandurang whose idol she had seen at Pandharpur.

Tukaram was recognised as a pious saint at that time and Bahina Bai considered him her guru and decided to follow his instructions and teachings. She recalled the sufferings that Sant Tukaram had to undergo. His famous 'Abhangs' were thrown into the Indrayani river, which were restored to him after thirteen days. She became so much devoted to the saint that she would often go into trance. It is said that seventeen days after the death of the calf, Sant Tukaram appeared before her and initiated her into spiritual Sadhana and gave her the mantra, 'Ram, Krishna-Hari'. Jayaram swami also came to visit her. Sant Tukaram seemed to advise her to set out on the spiritual path and leave the place. Everyone believed that she was mentally deranged, because she would often go into a trance and converse with her teacher Tukaram, which none understood. People began to pour into her house to have her darshan. This annoyed her husband further. He could not understand why his wife, who was Brahmin, should accept Tukaram, who was Shudra, as her Guru. He decided to quit the house and informed his in-laws accordingly, blaming his wife for all the ills. Just when he was about to start on the journey, he fell ill and remained confined to bed for seven days. Bahina nursed him and remained at his bedside attending to his wants. Gangadhar felt that his illness was due to the cruelties perpetrated by him on a devotee of Pandurang. When he recovered he expressed regrets for his behaviour. But the family wanted to go to Dehu to have darshan of Sant Tukaram. On reaching Dehu, they had a bath in the famous Indrayani river and then went for darshan of Sant Tukaram. The family stayed in an inn near a temple. There was one Mambaji who was extremely jealous of Sant Tukaram. He could never understand why a Brahmin family should go to Tukaram instead of him. He started a villainous campaign against the family. Bahina did not get upset on account of this vilification and remarked that such persecutions were meant to test the devotion.

Once Mambaji took away the cow, which had accompanied Gangadhar during all his journeys. He used to keep it concealed in his house. Everyone looked for the animal, but it was nowhere to be found. It is said that Tukaram by his

occult powers knew where the cow was. Whenever Mambaji beat the animal with a whip just out of spite, the marks were visible on the person of Tukaram also. Suddenly, Mambaji's house caught fire. People ran and rescued the cow also. At this time Bahina Bai gave birth to a girl. She was named Kashi. Bahina Bai felt that this new bondage was going to come in the way of her spiritual pursuits and so she once toyed with the idea of committing suicide. She cried out to her Lord to give her help in overcoming these obstacles. She sat in meditation for three days. Tukaram appeared to her and blessed her with the gift of composing poems. She was also told that this was her thirteenth birth and thereafter there would be no more births for her. She was going to get a son also.

The family then left Dehu and came to Shioor. Bahina Bai took a vow of complete silence. During this period, her husband and parents died. Sant Tukaram took Samadhi in 1650 and Bahina Bai went to Dehu and remained there doing austuries for eighteen days as a mark of respect to her preceptor. This was the time when Shivaji was coming to the forefront on the political horizon under the guidance of Samarth Guru Ram Das. Bahina went and met the saint who took Samadhi in 1681. Bahina again returned to Shioor. Bahina Bai was now about seventy-two years old. She knew that her end was approaching. Her daughter-in-law Rukmini died and her son Vithoba went to the banks of river Godavari to perform the last rites of his wife. Bahina Bai wrote to him to return post haste as she was certain to die after five days. Vithoba selected a suitable site for erecting the Samadhi of his mother and returned to Shioor. Bahina Bai left this world at the age of seventy-two in the year 1700 A.D.

Bahina Bai's poems are of a high spiritual standard. She has shed valuable light on the duties and obligations of a house wife. She says, "A wife can discharge the obligations of a wife and continue with her spiritual pursuits without any let or hindrance. She should have no anger, jealousy or arrogance. She should remain away from all types of sins.

**She alone is a truly devoted wife, who has subjugated all her passions and does not tire of doing service to saints and other spiritual persons."**

**Bahina Bai was a truly enlightened person. She developed new spiritual perspectives and held fast to her beliefs and faith.**

## SHRI NARSIMH SARASWATI

Amongst Maharashtrians and other Marathi speaking people, Lord Dattatraya is held in high esteem and veneration. He is said to appear often before his followers. 'Dutta' means 'to be present instantaneously without any prior notice' and 'Atreya' means 'son of Atri, the great Rishi'. His 'Poorna-avatar' (Incarnation in human form) is said to be Shripad Shri Vallabh and the second avatar is said to be Narsimh Saraswati. Based on him is written 'Guru Charitra' i.e. Life of Guru. The writer is Gangadhar Saraswati, whose ancestor was Sayamdeo, a close disciple of Shri Narsimh Saraswati. 'Guru Charitra' is written in the form of a catechism between 'Siddha' and 'Naamdharak'. The 'Siddha' is Guru himself and 'Naamdharak' is the writer of Guru Charitra, Saraswati Gangadhar himself. Though he was a Kannad, he wrote the book in Marathi in 'ovi' form, most probably from the original Sanskrit work. Many devotees have made a habit of reciting 'Guru Charitra' everyday.

Shri Narsimh Saraswati's parents were Madhav and Amba Bhawani. It is said that in a previous birth Amba Bhawani was called Ambika. She was blessed by Shripad Shri Vallabh and was assured that she would bear a famous son in her next birth. Amba Bhawani thus gave birth to a son much to the rejoicings of the parents and other members of the family. Normally soon after birth the boy cries, but in this particular case there was no such thing. Instead the baby sounded the primordial sound 'Aum' which surprised everyone. He was named Narhari. Even while he grew, he did not speak or utter a word. The parents thought that he was born mute. This distressed them immensely, but the child made signs to tell them that with the thread ceremony speech would come.

When he was seven, the auspicious ceremony was performed and to the delight of his parents, the boy began to speak. The parents and the family were extremely poor, but when Narhari touched an iron ladle, it was turned into gold

and their financial problems were solved. During the ceremony, when Gayatri Mantra was taught to the neophyte, wonder of wonders, the boy recited the same very clearly and correctly. As is customary, the neophyte came out to solicit alms, but while doing so he was heard to recite Vedic hymns much to the astonishment of the persons who gave alms. It was recognised that the child was no ordinary human being, but was God incarnate. When the ceremony was over, the boy asked permission from his mother to set out on pilgrimage. But the mother said that he was too young to go out alone. So the proposed pilgrimage was postponed for a year, after which Narhari set out. Before doing so he told his mother, "Do not grieve on my departure. You will be blessed with four children." Twins were born within one year of the thread ceremony and Narhari was therefore, all prepared to move out. He promised that he would come back to meet them.

He first travelled to Kashi before going to Badri and Kedarnath. At Kashi (Varanasi), he made his daily habit to go to Manikarnika Ghat, take his bath in the river Ganges and then get absorbed in meditation and adoration of the Lord. The holy Brahmins noticed his austerities and came to look upon him as a highly evolved soul. An ascetic named Krishna Saraswati, watched him every day and was much impressed by the boy's devotion. He decided to initiate him as a 'Sanyasi', i.e. one who has renounced the world, which stage is normally the fourth stage in a man's life. He questioned Narhari on this point and found that the boy was too eager to be initiated in this manner. The ceremony was performed and he was then called 'Nrishimh Saraswati'.

Soon afterwards, Shri Nrishimh Saraswati left Kashi for Badri-Kedar accompanied by many who had become his devout followers. A Brahmin, who became his devotee and also was initiated as a 'Sanyasi', was named Madhav-Saraswati.

Nrishimh Saraswati had left his home when barely eight. Now he returned after thirty years, having visited all the holy places of India. His mother was moved beyond words to behold his son after such a long time and would not let him

leave her now. But Nrisimh Saraswati took some sandal-wood paste and sprinkled the same over the wall and told his mother, "Look at this with faith after taking your bath, and look at the wall and you will then see me." After leaving Karanjnagar, Nrisimh Saraswati came to Nasik and took holy bath in river Godavari. By them he was well known as a great mystic saint and had many followers and devotees. Sayandeo, who later on became one of most trusted devotee, met him. He was under great mental tension, because he had been called to appear before the Muslim rulers to reply to grave charges against him. He begged Nrisimh Saraswati to honour him by visiting his house. Swami agreed and assured Sayandeo not to worry and to appear before the ruler with a confident air. Sayandeo did so and was surprised that all charges against him had been dropped and he was exonerated with honour.

Saraswati then proceeded to Parali-Vajnath and asked all his disciples to go out on pilgrimage, as he desired complete seclusion to devote his time to meditation and adoration of the Lord. After some time, he proceeded to Audumbar and remained there for some time. Many miracles connected with him occurred. From here he proceeded to Amarapur, famous as the sacred land of those who had spent their time in 'Tapasya'. Here Nrisimh Saraswati remained for some twelve years. Due to his long stay at this place, it was later on called as 'Narsoba-Chhi-Wadi'.

From this place Nrisimh Saraswati proceeded to Gangapur, situated on the banks of rivers Bhima and Anureja. Nrisimh Saraswati liked this place immensely and remained here for some twenty-four years. Many Brahmin families lived there. They requested Saraswati to reside with them, but the offer was declined. Instead, Saraswati decided to live with a poor Brahmin, who had a buffalo which was barren, but was used for carrying loads. Saraswati was moved to see his penurious condition and blessed the animal, who now gave plenty of milk. This miracle was the signal to everyone who realised the greatness of the saint. The village head-man accompanied by many approached Saraswati and begged him to establish his 'Math' (spiritual

centre) at this place. Nrisimh Saraswati agreed. The number of his devotees and followers increased and created a problem for him. He decided to leave to the discomfort of the inhabitants. Nrisimh Saraswati however promised to install his 'Paduka' (Sandals or Slippers) there, so that his presence might always be felt by devotees. Saraswati then returned to the range of mountains known as Shail and got absorbed in meditation.

It is difficult to find out the year and month when Nrisimh Saraswati was born. He was respected as a saint even when visiting courts of Muslim rulers. Nagnath, who became his disciple, met him at one such court. He was an ancestor of Gangadhar Saraswati, author of 'Guru Charitra'. His time is reckoned as the year 1564-1585. Nrisimh Saraswati went to 'Shail Parvat' some time in 1459. He went to Gangapur sometime in 1434 A.D. Historians have tried to work out by various methods the year of his birth and other details, but there is wide divergence of views. From 'Guru Charitra' only, surmises can be made. This work is considered very authoritative and abounds in various descriptions of the then prevailing conditions as also of the contemporary Muslim rulers and their courts which were visited by Nrisimh Saraswati. The work is a masterpiece in humility and complete devotion and has provided comfort and solace to many readers.

## SHRI SWAMI SAMARTH OF AKKALKOT

In the state of Maharashtra, Dattatraya is held in very high esteem. According to Puranic legends Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh once decided to test the purity and devotion of Sati Anusuya, wife of Rishi Atri. They assumed the forms of Brahmins and came to the hermits' cottage and desired to be served with food. Anusuya welcomed them and requested them to take their places on the wooden seats. The Brahmins however, insisted that they would accept food only when it was served by the lady without any clothes on her body. This was a very peculiar request, but Sati Anusuya prayed to her Lord to enable her to do the biddings of the guests. When she came out in that manner, the three Gods were transformed into three crying babies. Anusuya picked them all and fondled them like a mother. The three then became one and were called Dattatraya i.e. 'Dutta' and 'Atreya' of Atri, the Rishi. In the South as well in some parts of northern India, there are many temples dedicated to the worship of Dattatraya, who is said to combine in himself all the powers and virtues of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. Many saints are said to be Avatars of Lord Dattatraya. Samarth Swami of Akkalkot is said to be one of them.

In this case again, little is known about the birth or parentage of Swami of Akkalkot. He was first seen at a village called Mangal-Vedhe sometime in Shake 1760 corresponding to the year 1839 A.D. No one knew where he had been earlier, though it is said that he had spent a number of years in Himalayas lost in spiritual Sadhana. While lost in spiritual meditation, his body was covered with sand dunes and a wood-cutter, not knowing what lay beneath the mound, broke it with his pick-axe, resulting in injury to the thigh, which mark remained visible till his end. From the Himalayas he came down to plains and visited holy places like Kashi, Prayag etc. Finally he landed in Akkalkot. An English couple along with another Parsi couple met him at Akkalkot and enquired from him about the places he had been. Swami replied, "I left Himalayas and then went to Calcutta to have

darshan of Kali Mata. Along with the bank of the holy river Ganges, I visited various places including Haridwar, Badrinath, Kedarnath and then following the river Godavari reached Akkalkot and have now lived here for some time."

According to a popular legend, he was Nrisimh Saraswati, the famous saint of Gangapur reborn. Once Swami said that his age was over hundred years. To another querist, he laconically replied, "I am a low-caste by birth. My ancestor is Banyan tree, Dattnagar is my origin." These cynical replies conveyed no meaning, but an old woman interpreted them to mean that he was Dattatraya incarnate, who slept on banyan leaves. When further questioned, Swami Samarth replied, "I am Yajurvedi Brahmin by caste. My name is Nrisingh Bhau, Kashyap Gotra and my Moon was in Pisces sign of the Zodiac. If you ask any further questions, you will get a knock on the head."

Swami Samarth had a majestic form. Fair of complexion, over six feet tall, he had a broad chest, long arms and long hands. He was almost bare-bodied with sometimes only a strip of loin-cloth and walked with the gait and manner of a lion. Everyone, who saw him, was impressed at first sight. His face beamed with a strange divine glow. He spoke little and when he did, the language was full of riddles. He was a cynic of the highest type. People called him an 'aulia'. He frequently wandered all over the place, whether it was the cremation ground or a king's palace or a poor man's hut. He made no distinction between the rich and poor, Hindu or Muslims, high and low, between Indians or foreigners. Once Maloji Raje came to have his darshan riding on an elephant with all royal regalia. When he kept his head on Swami's feet, he received a loud slap with the remark, "Keep your royalty and egoism with you. They are not required here." The prince returned, but a change had taken place, because he had realised his folly. He returned travelling on foot and then was kindly received by Swami.

Here is a wonderful story of a Muslim, a prison guard. Once he had taken the prisoners out and when they returned, he discovered that one was missing. He searched for him

everywhere, but he was nowhere to be seen. His retirement was imminent. He knew that with this stigma his pension would be forfeited. Finally he prayed to Swami Samarth and promised that if the prisoner was found and he was not charged for negligence of duty, he would tender his resignation and devote himself to Swami's service. The prisoner was soon discovered hiding in a nearby canal. When asked why did he not escape, he replied that he tried to do so, but found that a sanyasi or hermit was standing guard over him. The prison guard realised how Swami Samarth had caused all this. He went to the Jail Superintendent and handed over the culprit and also tendered his resignation. He then came to Akkalkot and resigned himself to Swami's service. Swami Samarth welcomed him. Soon afterwards, Swami gave him his own footwear and asked him to return home to look after his family and children. At home, the footwear were ceremoniously installed and prayers and worship were offered with extreme devotion. This was not appreciated by the family and friends, who considered all this as an act of sacrilege and profanity towards the Islamic precepts. He was advised by everyone of his community to stop this paganistic worship; but all was in vain. He was then asked to leave the house which he promptly did. He took shelter in a dilapidated house, but continued his practice of worshipping Swami's sandals. But strange enough, someone brought to him everyday plates of eatables. His reputation as a saint soon spread. Persons suffering from various diseases came to him for help. All that he did was to take a pinch of the dust below the footwear (Paduka) of Samarth Swami and give the same to the patient. But the effect was miraculous, because it brought the desired cure. With the passage of time he came to be recognised as a realised person. He was taken back to his home and allowed to continue his practice of worshipping the Padukas. He was called an 'Aulia' meaning a Sufi saint.

There are a couple of stories pertaining to Europeans. It will be interesting to narrate a few:

(i) Once Swami's devotee Kishanrao Waknis while returning home sat by a well and used the water for cleaning his mouth and other parts of the body. This was witnessed

by a senior British Officer, who became furious at this desecration of a public well. He called Kondunana and punished him with kicks and blows. Kondunana went to Swami and narrated the whole incident. Swami Maharaj went to Mr Bomb's bungalow (that was the officer's name) and took him to task for his misbehaviour. Mr Bomb refused to talk to him even though he had high respect for him. Swami Maharaj said that he should take water of boiled rice. Within the next fifteen days, the officer was bitten by a poisonous insect and suffered immense pain. No treatment could give him any relief. He sent words to Swami Maharaj and begged to be pardoned for his misbehaviour. Swami Maharaj pardoned him and sent words that he should drink the rice-water mixed with crushed onion. This treatment brought about the desired relief within a week.

(ii) A European engineer working in the Railway workshop of the then Great Indian Peninsular Railway had no children. He came to Akkalkot and after Swami Maharaj's darshan stood in a corner with folded hands. Swami noticed him and said, "So you have no children. Go back. You will get one within a year." The officer was greatly impressed, because he had not said a word about his heart's desire.

(iii) In another case, a famous eye-specialist was working in the famous Sir Jamshedji Jijibhai Hospital. Along with other devotees this doctor, who was a Jew, also came for Swami's darshan. When Swami saw him, he immediately said, "How many eyes have you damaged?" The doctor could not understand what was said and the question was repeated. It was only then that the doctor wondered how Swami had found out that he was an ophthalmologist when he had said nothing. He became a staunch devotee of Swami.

(iv) Once the ruling prince of Gwalior, Shrimant Jayaji Rao Shinde came to Akkalkot to have Swami's darshan. He was accompanied by the famous Keralankar Govind Bua Nashikkar. Swami Maharaj was at that time residing in the palace of the ruling chief of Akkalkot. It was not his practice to meet anyone in the palace. The Maharaja of Gwalior had therefore, to wait for Swami to come out. The Swami however,

learnt of this predicament and came out and sat under a tree. As soon as the Maharaja of Gwalior came to know of this, he came along with his retinue for Swami's darshan. Swami knew his problems and mental anguish. He gave a discourse dwelling on these problems to the surprise of the Maharja who had not uttered a word. He gave spiritual advice to Govind Bua Nashikkar also. After some time, Maharaj Shinde was blessed with a son who succeeded him.

(v) Another ruling prince, who came to meet the Swami, was Shrimant Tokoji Rao Holkar of Indore, who came along with his sons and other relatives. Swami was at that time reclining under a tree and the Maharaja went there to have his darshan. He fell at his feet and said, "Due to good deed of my fore-fathers and revered Ahilyabai, I had darshan of these divine feet once when you were at Mount Abu. Good luck has again given me this opportunity." Swami asked him, "Are there mango trees in your garden?" Maharaj Holkar gave an affirmative reply. The Swami then took off his dress and threw the same towards the Maharaja. Now it was well known that Swami had never been to Mount Abu. There was no doubt that the Swami was omnipresent and had given Darshan, when actually he was all the time at Akkalkot only.

Sometimes Samarth Swami indicated replies to querries by signs. Shrimant Maloji Raje Bhonsle was the ruling prince of Akkalkot. He was a devotee of Swami Samarth. He had no children. He pined for one. When his wife, the queen became pregnant, everyone was anxious to know if there was going to be a boy or girl. When approached, Swami Samarth cynically replied, "Put on bangles." The querrists concluded that it was going to be a girl. And so it happened much to the discontent of the Prince. After some time the Maharani again conceived and the game of guess again started. Samarth was again asked. He got up and went near the oven as if he was cooking food. The indication was clear that the child would be a girl. And so it happened. The parents were disheartened and prayed to Swami to grant them a son. A third conception and this time when asked, Swami clapped his thighs and made visual signs as if he was

shooting a gun. Of course it was going to be a male offspring. A son was born and everyone thanked Swami for conferring his grace.

Swami Samarth was visited by people of all shades and vocations. Politicians and revolutionaries also came to have his darshan. One such a revolutionary was Vasudeo Balwant Phadke. He came to Akkalkot and fell at Swami's feet. Samarth knew what his questions were. Phadke placed a sword at Swami's feet and wished that if it was touched by Swami's divine hands, victory would be his. But Swami had the sword placed on one of the branches of a near by tree by one of his devotees. Phadke was greatly disappointed and left the place. He was shortly afterwards apprehended by the police near Gangapur.

After the suppression of the Mutiny in 1857, the Britishers came down heavily on the suspects. Some of them were hanged to death, some were put behind the bars and others were persecuted in various ways. Ruling princes of states if suspected, were deported and their states annexed. One such victim was Shrimant Appa Saheb Jamkhandikar. He was the ruling prince of Jamkhandi state. It was suspected by the then rulers that he had helped the mutineers. Appa Sahaeb Patwardhan, as he was called, was therefore, held prisioner at Vengurle and his state was placed under the administrative control of the Collector Belgaon. Gopalrao Joshi alias Hirlikar was a devoted servant of the exiled prince and being an inhabitant of Akkalkot he came there and implored Swami Samarth to help Appa Sabeh Patwardhan. Swami Samarth was moved by his devotion and turning his face towards Jamkhandi, he coverd it and said, "Come, Come, Come". Shortly afterwards, it was found that the charges against the prince had no foundation and he was exonerated with full honours. His state was returned to him and he returned to Jamkhandi and assumed full charge of the administration. Everyone was convinced that this was due to Swami's grace.

Here is another wonderful story of Swami's omniscience. About twenty-four miles away from Akkalkot, there lived a

and he also was a poor oil-man who was a widower. He lived in extreme poverty and did not know how to run the household, as he also had to look after his two children. He heard of Swami's divinity and came to Akkalkot. He fell at Swami's feet and begged for his grace. At the same time there was a Brahmin couple waiting for Swami's darshan. Samarth called the wife of the Brahmin and said, "These two children are really yours, as in your previous birth you were the oil-man's wife. Now go to his village and near his house you will find a tree, where you have buried a big metal pot full of gold sovereigns. Your own wishes will also be fulfilled." All this was extremely surprising. They did as directed. The place was dug up and true enough there was gold found. The oil-man now became rich and looked after his two children as was proper. The Brahmin couple also returned to their place and the woman conceived. They thanked Swami for his grace.

**Thakurdass Buwa** was inclined towards devotion to God from his childhood. He went to Narsoba Wadi and Gangapur and prayed to Lord Dattatraya. He was a good Keertankar and held the audience spell-bound while doing Keertans at various places including Bombay. It so happened that the Pandit became a victim of leucoderma and white spots appeared all over his body. His face became dreadful to behold. He was learned and could give long discourses over spiritual matters, but with an ugly face like his, he was extremely fearful of facing any audience. He decided to go to Kashi, but prior to that he went to Gangapur and prayed before the Padukas of Dattatraya. But he was still depressed, though that evening he again gave a learned discourse before a large audience. That night he had a dream and was threatened to go to Akkalkot for Swami Samarth's darshan. He proceeded to Akkalkot and met Samarth when the latter immediately asked for the musk which he had not brought. Thakurdass Buwa recalled that he had failed to apply musk to his Paduka at Gangapur and so his puja was incomplete. He went home and brought musk and handed it over to Swami Samarth fully realising that Samarth was omnipresent and omniscient. Swami distributed the musk to the children and threw a piece of burning wood at Thakurdass Buwa. Everyone felt that the desired blessings had been given.

Thakurdass Buwa took the wood and after making a paste of the wood applied it everyday to the portions of his body affected by leucoderma. Soon results were visible and the spots gradually disappeared.

His wife Radhabai also prayed to Baba and became his devotee. She had a seven year old daughter, but desired a son. Swami was pleased with her devotion and threw his night cap at her. Radhabai held it with great veneration and considered it a boon. Within one year she was blessed with a son, who was named Gurunath. Thakurdass continued in his devotion. Swami gave him his 'Paduka' and desired that they be installed in the Raghunath temple. Thakurdass Buwa obeyed these commands and brought the Paduka where they were ceremoniously installed in the local Raghunath temple. There they still are and devotees pay their respects even today.

Numerous such instances have been recorded when Swami Samarth showed his grace and miraculous things happened. Persons suffering from various diseases were cured. Where persons had become egoistic and suffered from arrogance, suitable lessons were taught to them through dreams or personal experiences. Even during his lifetime there were thousands of devotees drawn from all levels of society rich, poor, princes and paupers and there were followers from all religions.

Samarth became aware when his end was nearing. He called his devoted follower Ballappa, placed his ring in his fingers and instructed him to carry on the work after his demise. Sundarabai, another devotee of Swami, asked him when will he recover from illness, to which Swami replied, "When the hillocks will speak". Before going into Samadhi, Swami took off his valuable 'shawl' and desired that it be soaked in the nearby well. When this was done he gave it to Ramshastri Awadhani. Inspite of entreaties from his followers, who requested him to move into a house, the Swami continued to remain under the shade of a tree and gave up all food and drink. On the evening of thirteenth day of bright Moon in Shaka 1800, (1880 A.D.), the Swami merged into cosmic

consciousness leaving the body behind. One of his followers, Chollapa had already prepared a Samadhi Mandir as Swami's resting place and there the body was taken and after many prayers and worship it was interred in Samadhi. Where Swami had breathed his last under the banyan tree, a small temple was also constructed. All these places have now acquired sanctity and thousands of devotees visit these places today.

## GAJANAN MAHARAJ OF SHEGAON

Like many other saints, little information is available about the birth or parentage of Gajanan Maharaj. Das Ganu Maharaj, who was a close disciple of Sai Baba of Shirdi has however, chronicled few events of the saint in his book, 'Shri Gajanavijay' which was published in 1939. The work consists of 21 chapters and has some 3668 'ovis' or short lyrical poems. According to Das Ganu Maharaj, Gajanan Maharaj made his appearance for the first time at Shegaon on 23rd February, 1878. Shegaon is now a rail-head about 37 kms from Akola Jn. on the Bombay-Nagpur section of the Central Railway. Originally it was a small township, but has now grown immensely in size as well as importance, because of the 'Samadhi' of the saint, where on an average about ten thousand devotees come every day to offer puja.

According to popular belief, Gajanan Maharaj was first noticed sitting on a heap of leaf-plates, which had been discarded and thrown away after a feast at the house of one Devidas Paturkar. A young man was seen picking up grains of rice and other eatables from the heap where food particles and left-overs were still sticking. The first person to notice him was Bankatlal Agrawal. He narrated to his friend Damodarpant Kulkarni about this strange looking young man, who was wearing a torn loin-cloth and holding a broken jug for drinking water. The young man was otherwise a nondescript; yet he gave the impression of being unique and possessing spiritual powers. He was certainly no ordinary person. Thus moved, Bankatlal spoke to the young man, "Sir, why are you eating this discarded food thrown away like this? Kindly permit me to bring to you food properly served on a clean plate." But there was no reply and the young man continued to peck his food and merely looked at Bankatlal as if to say, "Please go away. Mind your own business". Bankatlal went to Paturkar's house and brought food served on a clean plate consisting of sweet delicacies and requested the young man to accept the same. The man simply looked once again at Bankatlal, mixed all the food

into balls and took a small quantity. Finding that there was no water in the jug carried by the young man, Bankatlal went back to bring some water. In the meantime, the young man got up and went to the trough where water was kept for the use of animals, filled his jug and drank. When Bankatlal objected, the saint replied, "Entire world is the creation of Brahma. There is nothing pure or impure. He permeates everything. The person who drinks or the water is of the same origin." Bankatlal and his friend were deeply impressed by this observation and came forward to prostrate before the young man, but he quickly got up, ran away and soon disappeared.

This is how Gajanan Maharaj had his first encounter at Shegaon. Bankatlal could not rest till he had found the man, but he was nowhere to be seen or found. Four days afterwards, there was 'keertan' by a famous 'keertankar', Govind Bua Taklikar, where a large gathering had turned up. There, sitting in a corner was seen the same young man. Bankatlal along with his friends went to him and craved his permission to bring some food for him. "Yes, you may go to that hut where lives the gardener's wife. Bring some bread and pickle from her." Thus permitted Bankatlal speedily went and brought the desired food. But the young man would have no other water, but the one flowing in the nearby drain. "How could dirty and contaminated water be brought?" When the jug was immersed in the drain, to their utter surprise, it was found that there was pure water. This was a miracle and the first one that the saint performed at Shegaon.

For the next four days, the saint disappeared once again and was nowhere to be seen. At the end of four days he was seen in Manik Chowk. This time Bankatlal succeeded in persuading him to visit his place and live there. Keertankars visited the town quite frequently, but Gajanan Maharaj hardly joined the usual Bhajans. He was only heard humming a peculiar song, "Gana-Gana-Ganaat-Botey". He was keenly absorbed in singing these lines, which were apparently meaningless. He was thereafter called 'Gingine Maharaj', which was later on changed to Gajanan Maharaj. Gajanan meaning 'elephant-headed' is one of the many names given

to Lord Ganesh. One meaning of this peculiar Bhajan is: "Jeevatma is always one with Páramatma and is not different from it. It should be thoroughly grasped: All life is part of the same 'Cosmic' entity and the body is that mere vestment encasing the soul. Body is a temporary abode and needs no change as vestment does." These soft words burred buri nosiyo eqiq-yojo s mili ritiw tigwod bsd sh eysw Jitisup bns ojd. Numerous miracles are credited to Gajanan Maharaj. His wise counsels, teachings and guidance were available to all who approached him for help. Shegaon became a place of pilgrimage in Maharashtra like Pandharpur where the famous Vitthal Mandir is situated. Gajanan Maharaj never put on any clothes and remained nude. He smoked from a clay pipe which was presented to him by one of his devotees. He was tall, well-built and was of wheatish complexion. His devotees looked at him as a great Yogi and realised person. When his end approached he was fully aware of the same. Two months before his samadhi he went to Pandharpur and addressed the deity seeking His permission to end his earthly career as his work was over. On return to Shegaon, Maharaj called his devotees and informed them of his forthcoming departure. He impressed on them to continue the spiritual activities commenced during his lifetime. On the 8th September 1910, which according to the Hindu calendar was the month of Bhadrapad, Shuklapaksha Panchami and a Friday, Gajanan Maharaj is said to have passed away. He left his last breath on this emso yarT. neibirdi erit ysws bessid bns. Now to cause on asw eroti jndi biss jrsidM. yots elorw trig. Gajanan Maharaj is credited with many miracles. He spoke little and whenever he opened his mouth, the sentences were riddles and the people round him could not understand what he said. It was only later that people realised that they contained great mystical and occult truths. He was truly a cynic and cared little for what others thought of him. He remained unaffected by ridicule or harsh speech of others. His self-control and equanimity were superb. Some of the miracles are listed below: bniot yarT. esom nrdi to tsa animis. Bisiw. nociocco ali ot boqeqi vlsboga need bari dohw zaldslogov bns (1). Once a person belonging to a particular tribe of mendicants, called Gosavi, came to Shegaon to have darshan of Gajanan Maharaj. He wore an ochre coloured cloth round his waist like a cloth. He now ehoqqan bsd gudi isusunu

his head and an underwear of the same colour. He carried a piece of deer-skin on his back. There were milling crowds waiting for darshan of the saint. This poor fellow did not know how to go near the saint. While at Varanasi, this person had heard about the saint, his grotesque behaviour and quaint ways. He had brought with him a clay-pipe containing heroin for use by Gajanan Maharaj. But the problem was how to approach him. Gajanan Maharaj, however noticed him and beckoned him to come near. When the supplicant merely stood before him completely dumbfounded, Maharaj asked him to take out the clay-pipe which he had brought. The supplicant prostrated before Maharaj and said that he had made a vow at Varanasi to make the present and begged the saint to accept it. Maharaj granted his wish and began to smoke from that day.

(ii) While at Bankatlal's residence, Maharaj had a strong urge to smoke. So he asked the children to go and get some burning embers of coal from some nearby household. As it was morning, kitchen fires had still to be lit and the children returned with dejected face. They then went to the shop of Janakiram and asked him to give some burning embers for the clay-pipe. Janakiram refused and shouted at the children. Janakiram had no respect for Gajanan Maharaj. When he was told that it was required for Maharaj, he became furious and chased away the children. They came and narrated the whole story. Maharaj said that there was no cause for worry. In the meantime Bankatlal hearing the story offered to light the fire and brought a matchbox. But Maharaj asked him to merely hold it over the pipe. And lo, fire was created and the smoking pipe was ready for use.

(iii) On the day of 'Akshaya Tritiya' it is customary to perform Shraddha ceremony of the manes and Janakiram was doing the same for his deceased father. When the Brahmins sat for their meals, they found that in one of the vegetables, which had been specially prepared for the occasion, there were small crawling insects. Everyone got up and refused to accept the food. Janakiram was greatly upset and soon realised that it was due to Maharaj's ire that this unusual thing had happened. He went and apologised and

begged to be pardoned for his stupidity to refuse fire for lighting the pipe. Maharaj simply laughed at this and the whole episode was dismissed and forgotten.

(iv) Once a person named Chandu-mukeen came to Shegaon to have Maharaj's darshan. He had brought with him some choicest quality of mangoes for being offered. While tasting the fruits, Maharaj asked him to explain why he had not brought the sweets which were kept in his house. Chandumukeen was perplexed, because he did not know what sweets were in the house. But when he went back, he found two pieces of sweets kept in a jar, which were absolutely fresh. He brought them back and offered to Maharaj, who ate them with great relish.

(v) Once Maharaj expressed a wish that he wanted to listen to ceremonial chanting of Vedic hymns and Brahmins should be invited for the purpose. The devotees demurred, not because they were unwilling to spend money for the purpose, but the problem was where to find such erudite Brahmins. Maharaj laughed at this and said that there would be no such problem. The Brahmins came and began the recitation of Vedic hymns. But their pronunciation was faulty. Maharaj intervened and showed to them how the mantras were to be chanted. The gathering looked with wonder, because they had never heard him recite the mantras before. The correctness of the accent and manner of recitation confirmed Maharaj's mastery in this direction.

(vi) Gajanan Maharaj often exhibited his eccentric moods. During one such mood, he would leave the residence and go on foot to far-off places without informing anyone. He thus went to a village called Adgaon. It was the month of April and the Sun was throwing its hottest missiles. Maharaj felt thirsty. He noticed a farmer tilling his field. Maharaj went to him and asked for some water to drink. The farmer named Bhaskar looked at the nude figure and chased him away. Maharaj remonstrated that it was a good act to offer drinking water to the thirsty. Bhaskar however, maintained his defiant posture and refused water. Maharaj noticed a well nearby and went there with the object of quenching his

thirst. Bhaskar told him that it was a dry well and there was no water anywhere within the radius of a mile. Maharaj however, remained unperturbed and said that he would try and see if water could be taken out of the dry well. Maharaj sat in a meditative posture under a tree near the well and implored divine intervention. Soon Bhaskar was astonished to see sprouting water gushing up in the well which was soon filled. Bhaskar realised that he was dealing with a saint. He prostrated himself and begged for pardon. Maharaj remained calm and cool and said, "Get up Bhaskar. This well is now full of water for the use of the entire village and there will be no need now to go far. You may lay a good garden also."

(vii) In Shegaon there lived one Khandu Patil whose uncle Kukaji wanted a grandson, so that his last desire was fulfilled before his end came. Having failed by all other means, he advised his nephew Khandu Patil to go to Gajanan Maharaj and implore him to grant the desired boon. Khandu did so and requested Maharaj to grant him the boon. Maharaj said, "Khandu, you are a rich person and possess all worldly things. Why have you come to a cynic and ascetic like me?" But Khandu persisted and then Maharaj said, "I can only pray to God. But if you get a son call him 'Bhikya' and entertain the whole village with sweet mangoes once a year." Khandu returned home and narrated all that had happened. His uncle was greatly pleased. Things happened as Maharaj had said and there were great rejoicings. The boy was named 'Bhikya' and Khandu invited the entire village to a grand feast in which he served sweet and choice mangoes. That practice is still observed.

(viii) Once a number of Gosavis came to Shegaon and asked Bhaskar Patil to make arrangements for their stay and food for two to three days before they leave for Pandharpur. "This should not be difficult for you since your village is already supporting a hide and good-for-nothing person." Bhaskar Patil did not like the manner of the group, but agreed to provide them food and lodging. In the evening the leader of the group, Brahmagiri Baba arrived. His discourse commenced with the famous lines of Geeta, "The soul is

indistructible. It can not be destroyed by fire...etc." But the discourse was mere pedantic and the lecturer had not lived the precepts that were preached. In the meantime Maharaj was sitting in his hut and was enjoying a smoke from his clay-pipe. While doing so, a spark from the pipe fell on the bed and it caught fire. Maharaj remained unperturbed. When his devotees approached him he asked them to call Brahmagiri Bua. When Bua arrived he was astonished to see that the whole bed was on fire and smouldering, but Maharaj was sitting untroubled. Maharaj told him that the Shloka was meant to be practised and realised, not merely read and translated. The fire was put out as if by a miracle and Brahmagiri Bua fell at the saint's feet and apologised for his indiscretion in criticising him. Gajanana Maharaj then addressed all the gathering and the crowd then dispersed singing his praise.

Bhaskar Patil was one of Gajanana Maharaj's earnest devotees. He was once celebrating the anniversary of the great saint Samarth Ram Das. After the feasting was over, a mad dog suffering from rabies came there and bit Bhaskar Patil. All were frightened and wanted to take Bhaskar Patil to the nearest doctor. Patil declined any treatment other than being taken to Maharaj. Gajanana Maharaj merely laughed at the incident and remarked, "Friends, listen to this carefully. Enmity, murder and debts are the only three things that cause rebirth. Obviously Bhaskar Patil has also to exhaust his karma. He must take care that he does not violate this supreme law." The crowd around Bhaskar implored Maharaj to help him. Maharaj said, "Friends, there is nothing like birth and death. The truth is that neither one is born nor one dies. One takes birth to exhaust his past karma. There was enmity between the dog and Bhaskar and that is why he was bitten. Bhaskar must not have feelings of hostility towards this dog. Otherwise in his next birth he will have to settle the accounts once again. Now Bhaskar has only two months more to live. He must therefore, take care that he lives peacefully and causes no harm or ill feeling towards anyone." Things happened as predicted by Maharaj and Bhaskar Patil died two months later.

(x) Pitambar was a devotee who served Maharaj faithfully. He was a factotum and did all kinds of jobs in the service of his Master. Once Maharaj observed, "Your name is Pitambar (i.e. yellow silken robed), but you are dressed in rags." Maharaj then took away the shawl that he had and gave it to his disciple. Pitamber accepted it in obedience to his Master's wishes. But other devotees did not like it and considered it as an act of affront towards the Master. They blamed Pitambar for the same. They made him feel miserable, inspite of his repeated assertion that he never asked Maharaj for it and had no intentions of robbing his Master of the valuable garment. When Maharaj heard all this, he asked Pitambar to leave Shegaon. Accepting this as an order from his Master, Pitambar left Shegaon and went to another village Kondoli. He sat in the shade of a mango tree, but soon found that there were numerous ants. So he climbed the tree and sat on one of the branches. All this time he was chanting his master's name. The ants were there as well. So Pitambar changed to another branch. But his ordeal was not over. Some boys playing nearby saw all this and went back to the village to report the incident. The villagers along with their chief Shamrao soon arrived and questioned Pitambar about his identity and purpose for coming to the village, because outwardly he looked like a russian. Pitambar modestly replied that he was a follower of Gajanan Maharaj and had left Shegaon under his Master's orders. Shamrao refused to believe him and asked him to leave the village at once.

Pitambar was not unnerved by this piquant situation and boldly asserted that his Master was Gajanan Maharaj. The villagers ridiculed him and said that Maharaj was a God-man and was famous for his miraculous powers. He had created ripe and luscious mangoes when there was no season for the same. If Pitambar claimed what he was, this dry mango tree should blossom forth with green leaves, otherwise there was no doubt that he was a fraud and an impostor. Pitambar begged of the people not to call him names or ask him to do impossible things. But the villagers were adamant. They said that his Master must come to his rescue, if he was a true disciple, otherwise he would be beaten and driven away. Pitamber wept and cried out to his

Master to save him. He also asked the crowd to join him in the Bhajans addressed to the Master. And the desired, but unexpected miracle occurred. Soft and fresh leaves appeared on the dried up branches. The crowd accepted Pitambar as a genuine devotee and went back.

Numerous miracles are credited to Maharaj. He was never pedantic. He never wrote any article or gave formal discourses. And yet from time to time after the miracles had taken place, he educated his followers about the lessons to be drawn. When he visited Bankatla's orchard and was stung by hundreds of bees, he remained unmoved and when his disciples ran to his rescue, he remarked that one must learn to suffer physical pains. It is easy to be pedantic and preach, but it is difficult to practise. One must develop 'Atma-Gyan' i.e. knowledge of the Self and not be satisfied with mere worldly knowledge. Saints do not perform miracles for miracle-sake, but there is always a purpose behind it. There is a lesson to be drawn, a fault to be corrected and a weakness to be removed. Man is a peculiar amalgam of human, animal and divine qualities. Normally he shows the first two qualities only. Only when he is in touch with a saint, the divine comes out of him. The miracles that he sees help him to develop new perceptions and he becomes aware of the divine. Then he turns towards God, becomes a better human being and a useful instrument for serving his fellow beings. Jugglers, magicians and mesmerists also perform acts which look like miracles. But the motive is selfish and mercenary. Saints perform miracles with no such motive. Their aim is to help mankind. It may be said, as sometimes some people say, that these saints do not work and merely remain alone and lead a parasitic life. Some even go so far as to say that they are blots to civilised society. Nothing can be farther from truth. Saints operate on higher levels of consciousness and help mankind from invisible planes. In this connection it is interesting to recall the famous couplet of Geeta when the Lord said:

"That which is night to all beings, in that the self-controlled man wakes; where all beings are awake, that is the night for the sage or Muni, who sees." (II-69)

Saints like Gajanan Maharaj are born to correct the erring humanity. They have no distinction of class or creed. They see all life pulsating with the same cosmic energy. They decry dogmatism. Bapu Kale was a devotee of Pandurang and Maharaj appeared to him in that form. He was a 'saint' and also a 'Paramhans or Jeevan Mukta'. Even after such saints have taken 'Samadhi' and their body perishes, the cosmic energy resident within that frame continues to come to the help of those who seek. After all Ram and Krishna, who are considered major Avatars perished thousands of years ago and their physical bodies disintegrated. But the divine energy that they possessed continues to operate. Energy is indestructible and so is divinity. Shegaon has become a place vibrating with divine energy and to thousands of devotees, who visit the shrine, spiritual experiences are obtained in proportion to their ability and devotion.

To miss Narsi T. eno eser lo visikey s toh haseeq yevitsusquco  
bus esalur esf lo **SAI BABA OF SHIRDI** bari bdsatbyH  
.hotabtupil vithi noor bari boorq arisnaM

isndi bnsid O vsh one maw enotibaco sif owo gowd  
bio, bsdig, "He who has not renounced evil ways, nor is  
controlled, nor concentrated, nor of subdued  
mind, even by knowledge he may not attain

Him."

"And when you had taken our leave, I found  
God's foot-prints on my floor." **Katha Upanishad I, ii, 24**

**Tagore**

The Year was 1858 bnsid O .asosunq grntollig ocl vsw  
vd rudi gafltd colov s bnsid ed nrdw dorsee esf nobrads  
isndi India had been mauled and disfigured by the blood-bath  
she had received at the hands of her alien rulers. The  
simmering discontent amongst the masses had suddenly  
erupted and shook the country as never before. The country's  
industrial potential had been destroyed and decline of  
agricultural inputs was complete. India was no longer a land  
of milk and honey. Its wealth had been siphoned off to  
England and by 1857, the ruination was complete. Indian  
states were annexed one after another and their rulers were  
banished. Indian culture, educational system, economic  
order and judiciary had been systematically eroded and  
replaced by western methods. Indian had found the alien  
Government utterly reprehensible. Sporadic attempts to  
throw away the foreign yoke had been muzzled before they  
could succeed.

An insignificant incident amongst the sepoys at Meerut,  
ignited the spark and a mighty explosion reverberated  
throughout the northern part of the country. The British  
rulers regarded the 'Wahabis' and 'Mujahids' as the main  
leaders of the movement and dealt with them ruthlessly. "To  
teach these rascally Mussalmans a lesson, Nawabs of Jhajjar,  
Ballabhgarh, Farrukhnagar and twenty-four Shahzadas were  
hanged." (i) Combatants, non-combatants, men, women  
and children were founched and tortured or put to death.  
The southern part of the country however remained

comparatively peaceful for a variety of reasons. The Nizam of Hyderabad had remained a staunch ally of the rulers and Maratha power had been fully liquidated.

Such were the conditions when one day Chand Bhai Patel, headman of Village Dhoop (District Aurangabad, old Hyderabad State), while going to Aurangabad had lost his mare, some two months back. He was greatly attached to his pet and looked for it everywhere. He had roamed about trudging through swamps and woods, but the animal was nowhere in sight. All was wilderness except few desolate trees. The landscape was wild, lonely and shagged. The sky was cloudless blue and the surrounding hillocks rolled in undulating pastels except where jagged crags ripped their way into glittering pinnacles. Chand Bhai was about to abandon the search when he heard a voice hailing him by name. "Chand Mia, come here, come here." Chand Bhai turned round, but could see no one except a crow winging its solitary flight across the sky. He thought that his fancy had deceived him and he turned back to continue journey when he again heard the same voice calling him. Chand Bhai then saw a young fakir (hermit) sitting on a boulder and reclining against a tree. He was surprised to see a human being in that lonely and unfrequented place and approached him with some misgivings. He was struck by the singularity of the stranger's appearance and dress. He wore a 'Kaphni' - a loose fitting garment with long sleeves - and a piece of cloth tied round the head and knotted in rear. His manner was inviting, but his eyes were piercing. There was something strange and incomprehensible about the stranger which inspired awe and discouraged familiarity.

"Chand Mia! You are worried, because you have lost your horse. Is it not so?"

"Allah be praised", mused chand Mia. "But how does he know my name and also about the lost horse. He must be a great fakir."

Chand Mia approached the Fakir respectfully and gave his respectful salutations saying, "Yes Sir, you are indeed a God-man and know everything. Please help me."

"Don't worry, Chand Mia", said the Fakir. "Your horse is grazing in the yonder field. Just call her."

Chand Mia was surprised and did, as told. Soon the mare came galloping. Their happiness at reunion was mutual. The master stroked and patted his pet. The animal reciprocated by licking and repeated neighings.

"Now Chand Mia, since you have found the mare, come here and drink some water. I too am feeling thirsty", the Fakir said.

"Yes Sir, I will mount the horse and go to the nearby village and bring some drinking water."

"Oh, no. You just come here." The Fakir struck the boulder with the stout stick he was carrying and there gushed forth a stream of pure and cool water. Chand Mia could not believe his eyes, but he drank the water.

"Now, let us have a smoke", and the fakir took out his clay-pipe. But where was the fire? The ground was now struck by the pair of tongs and a flame of fire shot up. Chand Mia took a few puffs and felt completely fresh. He then requested the Fakir to honour him by accompanying him to his house. The Fakir agreed and the two then set out for Dhoopgaon.

This was the Fakir, who afterwards went to Shirdi and lived there for some sixty years, becoming famous as Sai Baba, an appellation given to him by one of his devotees. Who was this Fakir, dressed in rags with no worldly possessions, asking for nothing, but giving spiritual guidance to all, uniting Hindus and Muslims as never before? Where did he come from? Who were his parents? Was he a Hindu or Muslim? How did he possess such miraculous powers that defied all known laws of nature and science? Was he an Avatar - a divine incarnation? Why did he choose Shirdi? It is impossible to provide answers to these questions. Let the story start from the beginning.

A maxim in Sanskrit says that it is futile to trace the origin of a river or the parentage of a godman. No information

is available about Sai Baba's birth, the place, parents or friends. It is therefore, difficult to say whether he was a Hindu or Muslim. According to his main biographer, Baba had mentioned to some of his devotees that his parents were Brahmins and he had been abandoned as a child to the care of a Muslim Fakir. The pierced lobes of his ears lent credence to his Brahmin parentage; but then he could have been a 'Nathpanthi' whose ears are similarly pierced and who are therefore, known as 'Kanphatta' yogis. No one investigated his parentage or his early childhood, though a devotee did visit Selu and inspected certain documents in the possession of the land-lord whose ancestor had taken Baba as his ward for some twelve years.

Baba appeared at Shirdi for the first time as a boy of sixteen and after some months disappeared for nearly four years returning to the place as a young man of twenty. Thereafter he remained at Shirdi for nearly sixty years, till his Maha-samadhi in 1918. He was said to be eighty then. It can therefore, be surmised that he was born sometime in 1838. But where? Once again we can only speculate that he was born at a place called Patri (in old Hyderabad state), since in later years Baba was known to make enquiries about some people of that place.

There is however, an interesting legend that has grown about Baba's birth and parentage. A Brahmin couple had no children and, therefore, prayed to Lord Shiva to bless them with a son. They observed severe austerities and devoutly prayed in the shrine room of their modest house. As a part of their spiritual 'Sadhana', they welcomed visitors to their house and were wont to offer them food and shelter. One day, a Brahmin with a radiant and fair countenance was welcomed to the house. He was offered food and a room for stay at night. Before retiring, the hosts enquired from their guest if he needed anything. The visitor replied demurely that he was not used to sleep unless he had some female company. This came as a bomb-shell to the surprised couple as there was no other female in the house except the hostess herself. They thought of turning him out, but that would have violated their vows of hospitality. Not knowing what to

do, they prayed to Lord Shiva to guide them in their ordeal. There was another knock at the door and there stood a bright and handsome lady enquiring about the visitor. She was admitted and shown the room where the visitor was. The door was closed and sounds of giggle and laughter could be heard. All this was strange and inexplicable and the couple wondered who their strange visitors were. Their curiosity got the better of their discretion and they peeped through the key-hole. To their utter surprise, they saw Lord Shiva and His consort Parvati before them. They went down on their knees and craved pardon for their indiscretion. Lord Shiva said, "Rise, I am very pleased with you. You will be blessed with a son. I shall be born as a son to you." The vision ended, leaving the couple utterly dazed. They did not know if what they had seen was phantasy or real.

As time passed, the lady became aware of the happy event. The couple were in their 'Vanaprastha' stage of life and when blessed with a vision of the Lord, found all their earthly desires consumed. They left their home and hearth and proceeded towards the forest. On the way, the lady gave birth to a son whom they left under a tree. It was under such circumstances that a passing Muslim fakir heard the wailing and crying of the baby and picked him up. He gave the infant to the loving care of his childless wife. The boy remained with his foster-parents for some four years where he picked up the rudiments of Islamic religion and philosophy. The fakir was a great 'Sufi' saint. When his end was nearing, he asked his wife to take the boy and entrust him to the care of Gopal Rao Deshmukh, a wealthy and saintly land-lord of Selu. Deshmukh was a great Yogi and willingly accepted the care of the boy. May be, he discovered the child's divinity and was aware of the important role he was destined to play in future as a great spiritual leader. It is also said that Deshmukh in one of his previous lives was Ramanand and recognised his disciple Kabir now incarnated as the boy. Whatever the truth, the young boy grew up under the loving care of his Master, towards whom he felt instinctively devoted. Deshmukh was a devotee of Lord Venkatesh of Tirupati and possessed many occult and mystic powers which he imparted to his

young disciple. Some twelve years passed in this manner and when Deshmukh became aware of his approaching end, he asked the boy to leave Selu and go westward beyond the river Godavari. The boy carried out his Master's instructions and after crossing Godavari, came to Shirdi where for the first time he was seen resting against a 'Neem' tree.

The year was 1854. Shirdi or Shail-dhi (as originally known, meaning the abode of Lord Shiva) was well known for its simple and religious people. It had a mixed population of Hindus and Muslims, the former predominating. There were just few houses dotted here and there interspersed with temples of Hindu Gods. For Muslims, there were two mosques, of which one had been abandoned as dilapidated with crumbling walls and dug-up floors. The presence of a young lad of sixteen resting against a Neem tree and lost in meditation attracted inquisitive crowds who did not tire of putting unending questions. The boy maintained a stony silence and refused to oblige. But the crowd was persistent and did not disperse till their curiosity was satisfied. The boy then asked them to bring a shovel and pick-axe which was done. The place was dug-up and revealed steps leading to an under-ground cellar. The place was surprisingly clean and well illuminated by four burning lamps in the niches. Fresh flowers spread their fragrance all round. A rosary was also there. All this took the villagers by surprise. The boy, however, sternly said, "This is my Guru's Samadhi in a previous birth. Now, close the place and seal it. It should never be reopened. Burn incense at this spot on Thursdays and Fridays. This will bring prosperity to the village." The villagers did as directed and quickly dispersed.

The boy remained at Shirdi for some months. He begged for his food and covered himself with earth at night to keep warm. He fetched water from the nearby well and watered the plants behind the tree. Some villagers continued to visit him, but failed to find out his antecedents or family. Gangagoor Baba, one of the local saints from Puntambe, once noticed him carrying water and remarked, "Blessed is Shirdi that it has got this precious jewel. The man is carrying water today but he is not an ordinary man. As this land was lucky, it

secured this jewel." Another saint, Anand Swami of Ycola, a disciple of Akkalkot Maharaj, made similar observations, "This is a precious diamond in reality. Though he looks like an ordinary man, he is not an ordinary 'gar' (stone), but a real diamond. You will realise this in the near future."

The boy, however, did not remain at Shirdi for long, and disappeared one day, much to the consternation of the villagers who looked for him everywhere, but in vain. It was four years later - sometimes in 1858 - that he came to Shirdi again, in the company of Chand Bhai Patel of Dhoopgaon. What was he doing during these four years and where was he? No one knows. Shri Narsimha Swami, a recent biographer has referred to a conversation between Baba and one of his disciples, wherein the former had mentioned, that during the 1857 holocaust, termed Mutiny by the Britishers, but hailed as the First War of Independence by the Indian, Baba had taken part in it allying himself with the Rani of Jhansi. No proof, other than the reference mentioned, is available to confirm or deny this. If he did participate, it is likely that as a lad, he joined a group of men attached to Nana Saheb Peshwa who was interned at Bithur (near Kanpur), and became a prominent leader of the movement, joining hands with the Rani of Jhansi. The following extract from a book, "*Eighteen Fifty-Seven*" by Surendranath Sen, (a publication of the Ministry of Information, Government of India), is relevant in this connection:

"Nana Saheb Peshwa had utilised the services of a few, and relied heavily on the magical power of a necromancer, Dassa Baba, and was financed by Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu and Seth Lakhmichand of Mathura. The Minister from Hyderabad whose name ended with Chand or Jang, was also in the conspiracy. Dass Baba had caused a small idol of lotus seeds to be made and divided in a chappatti, and as far as Chappattis went, Nana's influence was expected to prevail." (5)

No corroborative evidence is available to support or contradict this story. If Baba did go to the North, it can only be surmised that he must have found it extremely difficult to

return to the South, as the alien rulers were frantically searching for the participants in their desire to crush and destroy them. There were many 'Sufi' saints, called 'Aulias' roaming about in the northern part of the country and they alone were left out and did not become victims of witch-hunting. It is therefore, possible that Baba joined one such group and journeyed South, adopting their manner of dress and habits. If these surmises are true, Baba reached the southern part of the country sometimes late in 1858 and was reclining against a tree when he was heard and seen by Chand Mia Patel, as mentioned earlier. The thread's of Baba's life-history can be picked up from this point, as chronicled by Dabholkar in '*Sai Satcharittra*'. More of this later.

Chand Mia or Chand Bhai, as affectionately called by his friends, was a well known resident of Dhoopgaon, in the district of Aurangabad. When he returned to his village with his lost mare, accompanied by a fakir, the entire village turned up to welcome him. But they wondered, who that young fakir was whose mien was so confident and imposing. When asked, Chand Mia did not tire of repeating the miracles he had witnessed as proof of the mystical powers possessed by his young companion. Hearing them, the crowd surged forward and did not allow them to move till the young infuriated fakir picked up stones and hurled them all round. The crowd soon dispersed out of fear and the two proceeded. The fakir remained at Dhoopgaon for some time and when Chand Mia requested him to accompany the marriage party of his nephew to Shirdi, he readily agreed.

At Shirdi, the bride's parents had arranged to welcome the party on a piece of land adjoining the local Khandoba temple, (dedicated to the worship of Lord Shiva). Muslims and Hindus were present in large number to receive the party. In the commotion caused by the arrival, the young fakir quietly slipped away to the temple, where he was met by the priest and welcomed in those historical words, "Welcome, Sai. Come, Sai Baba, Come." After this initial welcome, the priest Mhalsapati realised that the new-comer was a Muslim and, therefore, could not be permitted to enter

the temple. His welcome was therefore, soon overcome by feelings of fear and suspicion. The visitor sensed this hesitancy and quietly walked back. The Muslims invited him to stay in the new mosque, but the offer was declined. Instead he walked slowly to the dilapidated mosque. Some villagers followed him and cleaned the place, which was full of cobwebs, rubbles and dust. Eccentric birds, hissing reptiles and other creatures not used to such intrusion, soon fled away. The fakir had, however, no difficulty in settling down, since he had hardly any worldly possessions except the clothes he wore, a tumbler, a shoulder-bag, a stout stick and a pair of tongs.

Here he remained for sixty years. The name Sai Baba, by which he had been welcomed, stuck to him thereafter. He named the place Dwarkamai after Dwarka, where Lord Krishna had lived many centuries ago, a name resonant with the Lord's leelas and earthly life. Some suggestions have been recently offered about the wisdom of naming the place as such. Geographically, Shirdi comes within the limits of Pandharpur which was the southernmost centre of Dwarka itself. Another interesting point has been brought out from a quotation in 'Skanda Purana' which runs as under: (6)

"The place where doors are open for all the people of four (Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra) classes for accomplishing the four Purusharthas, viz. Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha, is called Dwarka by the wise philosophers." Baba's masjid in Shirdi was not only open to the four classes, but also to the depressed untouchables and lepers etc. It was therefore, very appropriately named Dwarka Mai.

Baba's needs were extremely small. All that he required was some food which he begged at five houses and a small quantity of oil for lighting lamps. When out on his begging errand, he accepted a small quantity only which he transferred to the shoulder-bag and poured the liquid food in the tumbler. On return to the mosque, everything was mixed and then first offered to other beggars, then dogs and pigs. Whatever was left behind was then eaten by him and thus he continued to live.

He had intimate knowledge of herbs and medicines and these were administered with remarkable success. He came to be endearingly called 'Hakeem Baba'. He visited the homes of the sick, who were unable to come to him and even nursed them when necessary. Free treatment and certain cure, alienated the local Vaidya (one who practises Ayurvedic from of treatment) as his professional practice suffered.

A few years passed and the villagers got used to the vagaries of the fakir. Some grocers, however, resented the frequent demand of oil gratis. Once when Diwali, the festival of lights was approaching, they declined to oblige him. This made no difference to him and he walked back to the mosque unconcerned. A mocking crowd followed him, led by a mad impulse to enjoy the embarrassment likely to be created in the absence of oil. They watched his every movement, after fakir entered the mosque. He took out the tumbler, where a little oil was still left and mixed some water and then drank the contents. He then asked his attendant Abdul to pour water from the jug into the earthen lamps. "What madness and idiocy?" exclaimed the crowd. But their incredulity was soon transformed into awesome wonder when they found the lights burning brightly without a flicker. They realised that they had played a silly prank with a God-man. They all fell at Baba's feet and craved his pardon.

The story of this miracle spread far and wide and when morning dawned, a stream of visitors came to Dwarkamai to have his darshan and blessings. "He is God come to earth, he is a divine incarnation", they all murmured. "I am not Allah", replied Baba. "I am Yad-e-haq, a mere insignificant servant of God. Allah is the great Fakir. He will shower His blessings on you all."

As time passed, the number of his admirers and devotees grew. Cures and miracles occurred by hundreds. The mosque was renovated by his devotees, often in the teeth of opposition by Baba. His omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence came to be accepted as a matter of fact. People from all walks of life, far and near, high Government officials, lawyers, doctors, businessmen, whether rich or poor and belonging

to all religions and creeds visited Shirdi to receive His blessings. Some of them were slow in accepting His divinity and even resisted attempts from their friends to go to Shirdi; but once in His presence, all their inner resistance melted away and they became utterly devoted.

Baba rarely moved out of Shirdi and when he did, it was barely two to three miles away from the mosque. He slept in Dwarkamai and 'Chawadi' - the common meeting place of village folks, on alternate nights. Shirdi soon grew into a township and shops and buildings came up for the convenience of the visitors. One building, originally constructed by one of His devotees for consecration to the worship of Murlidhar - Lord Krishna - became His final resting place. It is the famous Samadhi Mandir where a life-size statue of Baba is installed on a marble platform. The statue in the sitting position seems vibrant with life and appears to look into the eyes of everyone entering the temple. Huge crowds from India and abroad come to Shirdi to seek His blessings. A ritualistic pooja and arti are performed daily beginning with 'Kakad' Arti at 5.15 hrs in the morning, followed by individual and collective Abhishek at 7.30 hrs and 11.30 hrs. Noon Arti is held punctually at 12 o'clock. In the evening the 'Arti' takes place at 6.30 p.m. and the last Arti called 'Shej-arti' at 10 p.m. Main festivals like Ram Navmi in April or thereabout, Guru-Poornima in July and Dushera in October are ceremoniously observed.

Occurrence of miracles as evidence of Baba's grace has not ceased; their number has been steadily growing. Some of them are narrated by the beneficiaries through the pages of '*Sai Leela*'—the monthly journal. The writers are persons of dependable bona fides, and their statements can be accepted as true. The number of His followers has been increasing steadily. His grace and help are available not only to those who believe in Him, but even to others.

Osborne in his famous book '*The Incredible Sai Baba*' has recorded the case of Miss Dutton. She was a pious old lady and a nun in a convent. In her old age she found the discipline too rigorous and decided to quit after obtaining

pontifical absolution. But her problem was to settle down somewhere with someone who would look after her in her old age. Her nephew in Calcutta was willing to accommodate her, but she was not sure of the reception or treatment she would receive at his place. While musing over her problem in her solitary room, she was astonished to see an Eastern fakir suddenly appearing before her. He consoled and then counselled her to go to Calcutta and assured her that all would be well. She was stunned to find a fakir appearing in her room and again disappearing suddenly. But she heeded the advice and came to Calcutta. Everything happened as she was told. While in Calcutta, she met Osborne and wondered if he could explain the mystery of the fakir. Osborne pulled out a picture of Sai Baba and Miss Dutton was quick to identify the nocturnal visitor. Many cases of this nature have been narrated through the monthly '*Sai Leela*'. Some of them will be described later on.

Let us close this chapter by a brief description of the holy places at Shirdi as they exist today.

### **Samadhi Mandir**

The construction of this temple was commenced during Baba's life-time. Though originally intended for the worship of Lord Krishna, it became the Samadhi Mandir of Baba. The marble statue in the sitting position is mounted on a marble platform and was sculptured by Talim of Bombay. It was ceremoniously installed by swami Sharan Anand in 1954. There is a spacious hall where devotees gather. In a room on the left of the hall, various articles in the personal use of Baba are kept for public view.

### **Dwarkamai**

Dwarkamai, as the old mosque was named by Baba, is another holy of the holiest. A portrait of Baba painted during His life-time is displayed. The stone slab on which Baba used to sit is still there. In front of the portrait, a fire first lit up by Baba, is kept burning perpetually even today. A grinding stone, a wooden pillar, an oven and His slippers are preserved as His souvenirs. The chariot and the palanquin

used for carrying Him in procession are also displayed and open for public view.

### **Chawadi**

This is situated to the east of Dwarka Mai and has become holy as Baba used to sleep here on alternate nights. Pictures of various deities are displayed, as was done during Baba's life-time.

### **Gurusthan**

This is the place under the Neem tree where Baba sat when He came to Shirdi the first time. Incense is burnt here, day and night. Strangely the leaves of the tree (Neem tree) have lost their natural bitterness.

### **Lendi Bag and Nanda-Deep**

A drain called Lendi Nullah originally flowed here and was used as a burial place. The drain has been filled up and beautiful garden has been developed on it. A ceremonial lamp, called Nanda-Deep, is kept lit up perpetually. A temple dedicated to the worship of Dattatreya has been built at this place. There is also the Samadhi of the horse Shyam Sunder, who was known to bow down to Baba when He was there and afterwards to the Samadhi Mandir. Samadhis of Baba's constant companion and attendant Abdul, Bhau Maharaj and Tatyā Kote Patil are also there.

### **Khandoba Temple**

It is a small temple situated on the Ahmednagar-Kopergaon Road and is famous being the first temple where Baba was welcomed by Mhalsapati.

There are a Library and Reading Room for the use of visitors. Books, pictures and other literature are available for sale. The Shirdi Sai Sansthan is a registered public trust body registered in Ahmednagar Court in 1922. It is at present under the control of Civil Court, Bombay. The management is carried out through the Court Receiver.

The nearest Railway station is Kopergaon at a distance of about seventeen kms or ten miles. It is situated on the Dhond-Manmad section of the Central Railway. All trains running on this section stop at Kopergaon for the convenience of the visitors. A net-work of Raoadways buses connect Shirdi to various places, both near and far away. Excellent boarding and lodging arrangements are available at reasonable rates. There are plans for further expansion.

## SHRI NARAYAN MAHARAJ OF KEDGAON

He was born in 1886 A.D. at Bagalkot in the district of Bijapur. He lost his parents when a child and was brought up by his grand-mother. He was admitted to the local school, but did not have much inclination for studies. He spent his time with his playmates and was considered a naughty child. But on returning home, he would go to the shrine and sing hymns to God, which he had heard his grand-mother sing. Thread ceremony was performed when he was nine. With this uncertain life, he left Nargund, his mother's town, and convinced that only God was his succour, he began meditation on Lord Dattatreya. Narayan wandered the whole of Karnataka. He used to approach various households for his food. After remaining at a place for two to three months, he would move to another place. His habit was to get up early in the morning, do his morning Pooja and Sandhya and then go about the town. Sometimes shelter was given to him by some kind people for few months, but he never remained there for long.

From Karnataka he came to Maharashtra when he was just fifteen or sixteen years i.e. in or around 1900 A.D. At a village named Boapgaon, he took residence in a local temple. While living here, he would tend children and teach people to sing Bhajans. In other matters also he would devote his time in doing service to the needy. The Kulkarnis, Trimbak Rao and his wife Lakshmi Bai, treated him as their own child and Narayan received all the parental love and affection from them. Narayan found an earnest friend in Kulkarni's nephew, Deshpande with whom he spent much time. Deshpande owned some land far into the waste-land which was used as a 'Sansthan' for carrying on spiritual work.

Many anecdotes are narrated about his childhood. When he was just nine years old, once a snake appeared in the class room. Everyone ran helter-skelter shouting to each other to catch the reptile, but no one actually came forward to perform the task. Narayan without any fear came forward

and caught the reptile by its tail and then revolved it in circles, because he had heard that by this method, a snake became immobile and harmless. Everyone admired the boy's courage and presence of mind.

Narayan had taken his residence at the house of an aristocrat. Both husband and wife extremely liked the boy and looked after him well. Narayan addressed the lady as mother and became devoted to her and rendered whatever help he could in household work. One incident is worth narrating. At the house of this couple a great festival used to be celebrated. A palanquin was got ready, but to their dismay, it was found that the carriers were unable to lift it, however they tried. When all efforts failed, Narayan, then a lad of twelve, tried his hand and lo! the palanquin was lifted as if by some other force. This incident caused a great respect towards Narayan and the couple felt that he should stay with them permanently. They took good care to look after him. This was not liked by the lady's brother, who felt that money was being spent on a useless boy and under some pretext, he took the boy to his own house where much of the household work was assigned to him. He was treated like a meanial. Narayan out of disgust left this house. When the sister came to know about this, she resented her brother's behaviour. She began to behave like a mad person and in the end died.

After leading a nomadic life from place to place, Narayan got tired and went to riverside and slept there. When awake he noticed that a snake had coiled round his leg. Any other person in his place would have become panicky, but Narayan kept his cool and just began to pray to God. It so happened that heavy rains came and the river was inundated and overflowed the banks and covered even Narayan's legs. The snake uncoiled and left the place in fear. Narayan was thus saved.

On another occasion, he took shelter in a temple dedicated to the worship of Hanuman, the monkey God. The place was considered as a haunted place. People were afraid to visit the place at night, because it was believed that goblins spent

night there and if they were disturbed the intruder would lose his life. When Narayan got up in the morning, he was amazed to find that though he had no bed to sleep, a good mattress was there on which he had slept. But who could have done that? In the morning, when he came out, people were amazed to see a person coming out alive and well looked after.

While living with his god-parents, Narayan had continued his Yogic practices. Once a gentleman came and enquired about Narayan. He informed the god-parents that he had been ordered in a dream to go and look for a boy named Narayan and then take him to Gangapur, which is considered an important place for the worship of Lord Dattatreya. Narayan came to Gangapur and his one desire was to have real vision of the Lord. He began his austerities and practised meditation. After visiting the local shrine he would go on his morning errand of begging for food. Whatever he got, he would first offer to God and only eat afterwards. He took his residence in a local cave and practised meditation in complete seclusion. At Gangapur Narayan Maharaj found peace and left the place under Lord's orders.

Narayan Maharaj, as he was now reverentially addressed, devoted all his time towards the service of mankind. Mention has been made of one Nana Saheb Deshpande. He and his wife were greatly drawn towards Narayan Maharaj. On a piece of land, that belonged to them, a small cottage was built and the three of them lived there spending all their time in meditation and other austerities. The villagers began to visit the place and once when the ground was dug up, there were revealed 'Padukas' or holy slippers of the Lord Dattatreya. This was considered a miracle and the number of persons visiting the place to seek the saint's blessings began to grow as each day passed. Buildings came up and the entire area was considered as a great and holy place. Devotees came to the place from far and wide and 'Narayan Maharaj of Kedgaon' became a cherished name.

Narayan Maharaj continued to inspire many persons, and to this day the place is visited by many for prayers and peace. The saint is very popular in Maharashtra.

## SENA NHAVI

'Nhavi' literally means a barber and hair-cutter. This is the story of Sena, who was a barber in the service of the King Veer Singh, who ruled in Bundelkhand in fifteenth century. Veer Singh was a kind but a ruthless ruler and punctilious in his appointments towards his subordinates. He was wont to have his morning shave and massage from Sena, who was expected to report at the palace at a fixed time. Once it so happened that while Sena was proceeding towards the palace, on the way he joined a Bhajan-Sankirtan. He became so completely lost in it that he did not realise that it was time for him to go to the palace. Here Maharaja Veer Singh was getting impatient, because he had other pressing engagements. He became enraged and decided to teach Sena a lesson for neglecting his duties. While he was thus fretting and fuming, he saw the barber coming. He accepted his apologies and ordered him to proceed immediately with his work. The barber shampooed the head and began massaging the body according to his usual custom. In front of the king was placed a small bowl containing oil. In the bowl were reflected the faces of the king and the barber. The King's surprise was great, when looking at the bowl he saw the form of Lord Krishna with his four arms, discus, conch and a mace. The image was splendid. He took his eyes away and saw the barber busy with his work. Everytime the king looked at the bowl of oil, the Lord's reflection would be seen. The king was puzzled by this mystery, but said nothing.

When Sena found that the time to go to the palace was past after the Keertan was over, he realised his mistake and went home; because he thought that it was too late to go to the palace. Next day in the morning, he went as usual, apprehending severe scolding from the king for his absence on the previous day. The king however, received him with great respect and awe. As Sena commenced his work, he found the king eagerly looking into the bowl containing oil. But the vision of the previous day had vanished and instead

the staid face of the barber was reflected. The king kept on looking once at Sena's face and the next moment at the bowl. Sena felt surprised when the king asked him, why did he not show the face that was reflected the previous morning. Sena muttered his excuses and assured the king of his complete ignorance of whatever had happened. The king then confided that the previous morning when Sena had come, he had seen the reflection of the Lord Krishna in his majestic form while Sena continued to shave him. Sena could not understand what was being said, but soon realised that while he was lost in attending the Keertan, the Lord had assumed his form and deputised for him and performed his usual assignment. The king begged of Sena to favour him once again and show the Lord's form. Sena prayed and begged and the Lord obliged him and granted his prayer.

The king was much pleased with Sena and gifted to him much gold and money, so as to remove all traces of poverty.

The story of Sena Nhavi proves, if proof is needed, that in the eyes of the Lord there is no body high or low and that he cares for his devotees and comes to their rescue at the hour of need. The Lord has said in the Geeta that who so ever meditates on him. He looks after his needs and gives him whatever is wanted and also preserves for him whatever has been given. One of Sena's songs, which he composed in prasie of His glory, says, "Blessed am I, I have seen Thy Feet, O! my Lord."

Truly has it been said that 'Work is Worship'. No work is high or low and if we can spiritualise our work as an act of dedication to Him, it is as good as any Sadhana.

## ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

"Probably there is no saint whose name occurs in the Church's calender, perhaps there is no hero in history, who has more enthusiastic admirers than St. Francis Xavier.", thus observes Alban Goodier in his collection of the lives of Christian saints, titled, '*Saints for Sinners*'. There is no dirth of panegyrists who have acclaimed the saint as an all-time great in human history, whereas some have decried him as a case of utter failure. But then there is greatness of success as there is greatness of failure. So, whether successful in his mission or a failure, his greatness as a human being is beyond any shadow of doubt. He had some staunch friends and also an equal number of persons hostile to him.

St. Francis was born in a royal family in Navarre (Spain) on 7th August 1506. He had a brilliant academic career and so his mother saw in him a person dedicated to higher studies. He was therefore, sent to the renowned University of Sorbonne in Paris, which was considered as a renowned place of learning. Fate had however, other designs for him and it was here that he was thrown in the company of Ignatius Loyola, a Captain in the army. Ignatius was a highly evolved soul. In reply to Francis' dream of becoming a renowned scholar he remarked, "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world, if he suffer the loss of his own soul?" This observation made a strong impression on the young man which changed his entire future. He joined a group of seven companions, who in an under-ground cell of Montmartre found a group totally dedicated to the Service of God with a motto, '*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*', meaning 'To the Greater Glory of God'. The world famous order of priests - the 'Society of Jesus' was formed on this day. They offered their services to the Pope who commissioned them to go to the East. The group landed in Goa, which was then a Portuguese possession, sailing amidst tempestuous weather on board the ship 'Santiago'.

From the day St. Francis threw his lot with St. Ignatius, he was a disappointment to those who first believed in his

unique capabilities. This was because St. Francis had his own views on religion and about service to man. The University was disappointed in him. It had bestowed on him every opportunity of advantage. It had made him a Professor. To his later companions, the members of the Society of Jesus, his life seemed so arranged, his character was so different that it resulted in disagreement all round. Amidst such conditions, he had set sail for India on his birthday in 1541, when he had just turned thirty-five. On arrival at Goa, he found things very different. The people were starved, depraved and there was no vice that did not thrive in this land. Slave trade was prominent and promiscuity could be seen everywhere, in the Government, the Church and Society and no place was considered sacrosanct. Goa was a city of luxury where Europeans vied with one another with people of Asian origin. There were people that hated every form of religion that was forced on them with fire and sword, often inveigled with vague promises of reward. Some were compelled to intermarry with the Portuguese. The people, in short, were a completely demoralised lot. The priesthood had the laxest morals. Every nun had her serf-attendant. Religion had become a means for conquest and wealth.

Into such a state of turmoil and confusion, St. Francis had to work. He was always at war with the Portuguese officials, because he made clear his differences with the manner things were done. Francis Xavier was a person, who lived by the strength of his convictions and knew that the end of his goal was not a cul-de-sac, but something which he was destined to achieve. Of the few companions that he took, only one remained attached to him. He possessed extraordinary powers as Papal Nuncio and Plenipotentiary of the King of Portugal, but even these proved of little use against the odds that confronted him. As things developed he felt that there was no use for him in India and he longed to go anywhere to carry out his mission, even to places like, Abyssinia, Arabia and Madagascar.

St. Francis had set his heart on the College of St. Paul in Goa. This College, which he reconstructed, was to become a nursing home for real missionaries who were to be devoted

servants of mankind. He felt that there must be a Rector of the College of his own choice, who could carry out his plans of restructuring the whole institution. In response to his urgent summons for a worthy Rector, there arrived a young Jesuit father, Antonio Gomez, a devoted disciple of the University of Coimbra. He was the very antithesis of St. Francis' philosophy of life. Soon after his arrival in Goa, he made his mark amongst the elite of the town and made a favourable impression on all who came in touch with him. He seemed to despise St. Francis and considered himself too important and big to pay any heed to the desires of the Saint. Gomez ruled with the strength of an iron rod and set about reforming the students, the alumni and all others after his own fashion. St. Francis' remonstrations had no effect. The crisis had developed in a few months between his return from the East Indies and impending visit to Japan. In two months he reached Malacca and a month later, he was on his way to Japan. Before leaving Malacca he wrote a letter to the Provincial of Portugal asking for a replacement for Gomez. (A Provincial is head of the religious order in a Province). St. Francis was in Japan for over two years and on his return to Goa he found that Gomez was still there.

Complaints against Gomez had been received by St. Ignatius, who was the Patron of St. Francis. To get over the difficulties, he constituted India as a separate religious province, independent of the Province of Portugal and appointed St. Francis its first Provincial. Francis sailed from Malacca to Cochin when he found that things had gone from bad to worse. Meanwhile Antonio Gomez had constituted himself as the Vice-Provincial. St. Francis Xavier arrived in Goa in February 1552. As the new Provincial he had supreme powers. Antonio Gomez was sent to Diu, far up the coast. Fr. Gaspar was appointed in his place.

On Maundy Thursday of the same year he set out once again for Malacca and to other Far East places. Alas! he never knew that he would never return. From Malacca, he went to Japan, where people flocked to hear him. His attempts to enter China failed. In November, he lay in a hut dying on the hill-side of Sancian in a solitary cave with none

at his bedside. He was then forty-six. The body was buried in the sands on the Chinese shores of Sancian island until some fishermen found it. As he had loved Goa fondly, he had always expressed a wish that his body should be buried in Goa. The body was thereafter brought to Goa and then laid to rest. Pope Paul V beatified him on 25th October 1619 i.e. he was declared to be in happy company and was to be revered as such by the Catholic Christian community. Finally, on 12th March 1662, he was canonised, i.e. enrolled in the register amongst the list of saints and proclaimed as a Patron and Protector of all the East Indies by Pope Benedict XIV in 1747.

For over four centuries now the body of St. Francis has withstood the ravages of time and remained incorrupt. The death-defying body has remained placed in a cask in the Bom Jesus Cathedral of old Goa and is open to public view and worship. He is worshipped as the 'Patron Saint of India'. His spirit broods over southern India.

His feast is celebrated every year on 3rd December, where many devotees come.

## SRI AROBINDO GHOSH

Sri Arobindo was born on 15th August 1872 at Calcutta. His parents were completely westernised and so they sent Arobindo and his elder brother to England for their education, as they did not wish their children to have any Indian influence. Sri Arobindo imbibed the best of European culture. He passed the Indian Civil Service Examination and then got himself purposely disqualised by remaining absent in the horse-riding lessons. He met the Gaekwar of Baroda in England and came to India after joining him as his Personal Secretary.

While at Baroda he joined the Baroda College as Professor, teaching French and then English. He was the Officiating Principal when he left for Calcutta in 1906. While in Baroda he had assimilated the spirit and ethos of Indian culture. His leanings towards politics had already taken roots, preparing him for his future political and spiritual work. He was the first to declare complete Independence as the final goal of the freedom struggle. Bengal was divided in 1905. Sri Arobindo left Baroda in 1906 and joined the National College, there as its Principal. He secretly planned for an armed struggle for achieving independence. To propagate his views strongly, he wrote in 'Bande Mataram' and later on also in 'Karma Yogn'. The people of India felt enthused and were fired with new hope when they had lost all hopes and were getting frustrated. It is therefore, significant that when India achieved freedom from foreign rule, the date selected was 15th August, the birthday of Sri Arobindo.

Arobindo's work in the political field was a part of the larger work he did for the whole humanity. He had commenced practice of Yoga in 1902, but took up the exercise seriously in 1904 by practising Pranayam as explained to him by a Maharashtrian Yogn. He practised it for full four years opening up new and vast horizons of spiritual awakening and new realisations. He found new strength for carrying out the task that awaited him. His speech, better known as

Uttarpara speech, shows its vigour and purpose. He was jailed in Alipur for full one year (from May 1908 to May 1909). He had spent his time in the jail practising meditation and study of Upanishads together with other religious scriptures. His major realisation was an unqualified realisation of the universal Presence of the Divine in the form of Lord Krishna or Vasudev. At the time of judgement in the court of law, he fancied he saw Sri Krishna everywhere and in everyone. The Magistrate, Prosecuting Counsel, the witnesses were all various forms of Sri Krishna. This is what he wrote about them: ('Sri Aurobindo on Himself', Centenary Library Vol. 26)

"I...knew something about sculpture, but (I was) blind to painting. Suddenly one day in Alipur jail while meditating I saw some pictures on the walls of the cell and lo and behold! the artistic eye in me opened and I saw some pictures on the walls of the cell and I knew all about painting except of course the more material side of the technique."

While in jail he also had some experience of levitation, which he has described in a succinct manner. While in Alipur Jail, Sri Aurobindo was also heading towards two other realisations, that of Supreme Reality with the latent and transcendent Brahman as Its two aspects and then of a much superior level of consciousness i.e. Super or Cosmic Mind, which words later on became associated with his name. After his release from jail in 1909, he received the divine command in 1910 to go to Chandernagore and later another direction to go to Pondicherry to commence the work for which he was born. He reached Pondicherry on 4th April 1910. From a letter written in 1911, we can get a glimpse of the work that awaited him:

"I need some place of refuge in which I can complete my Yoga, unassailed and build up other souls around me. It seems to me that Pondicherry is the place appointed by those who are Beyond, but you know how much effort is needed to establish the thing that is purposed upon the material plane."

Sri Aurobindo discovered new meaning in the cryptic verses of the Vedas. He developed new understanding and an idea of the Supermind through some illuminating flashes. The value of the new formulations, arrangements and meanings hidden in the ancient texts was revealed to him as a result of his meditative practices. The secret power of the Supermind with its all too glorious majesty and grandeur was seen by him that became a sheet anchor of his philosophy. Given below is one extract from his 'Supra-mental Manifestation upon Earth':

"The Supermind is in its very essence a truth-consciousness, a consciousness always free from the ignorance which is the foundation of our present natural or evolutionary existence and from which nature in us is trying to arrive at self-knowledge and world-knowledge and a right consciousness and the right use of our existence in this world. The Super-mind because it is truth-consciousness has this knowledge inherent in it and this power of true existence, its course is straight and can go direct to its aim, its field is wide and even be made illimitable." At Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo made out a programme of his Yoga in the form of Sanskrit mantras that was 'Sapta Chatushthaya' meaning seven tetrads. It is related to the work of the descent and manifestation of the Supermind in the physical life. In a letter written during 1913, Sri Aurobindo set out the aims of his work and what he was wanting to accomplish:

"What I am attempting is to establish the normal working of the Siddhies (Faculties or powers) in life, i.e. the perception of thoughts and feelings and happenings of other beings and in other places throughout the world without any use of information by speech or any other data; second, the communication of the ideas and feelings I select to others, (individuals, groups, nations) by mere transmission of will-power; third, the silent compulsion on them to act according to these communicated ideas and feelings; fourth, the determining of events, actions and results of action throughout the world by pure silent will-power..."

Sri Arobindo met the Mother on 29th March 1914 when she came to Pondicherry. A new saga of partnership, mutual appreciation of the work that was done jointly in the occult worldy by the two saitns commenced. And then the Second World War broke out. Throughout the period it lasted, the two were in a state of constant tension which caused an obstruction in their joint Yogic practices. The War ended in 1945 with a victory for the Allies, as willed by Sri Arobindo. And then came the Indian Independence after partition of the country, bringing in its toll loss of human lives and property. The two saints felt that though Hitler was dead, the ugly forces working behind him still existed. Sri Arobindo continued to spread his philosophy with a profundity unknown before. He wrote various articles and books. His own physical frame was showing signs of decay and in early 1950 he told the Mother, "One of us must go, we can't both remain on earth." The Mother said, if that be so, "It is I who must go" and the Master said, "It can't be you, because you alone can do the material thing." While Sri Arobindò was correcting his '*The Book of Fate*', the last lines that he dictated were as under:

"A day may come, when she must stand unhelped on a dangerous brink of the world's doom and hers, carrying the world's future on her lively breast, carrying the human hope in a heart left sole. To conquer or fail on a last desperate verge. Alone with a death and close to extinction's edge. Her single greatness in that last dire scene, She must cross alone a perilous bridge in Time and reach an apex of World-destiny where all is won or lost for man."

The Master laid aside his mortal coil on 9th December 1950.

Sri Arobindo is one of the greatest original thinkers of modern times. A great Yogi indeed, who explained to the world cosmic consciousness and the concept of the Super-mind or supra-mental states. His thoughts and philosophy had an originality that is atonce impressive. His important works are '*The Life Divine*', '*The Synthesis of Yoga*', '*The*

*Ideal of Human Unity*', '*The Human Cycle*', '*The Foundations of Indian Culture*', '*Essays on the Geeta*', '*On the Veda*', '*The Future Poetry*', '*The Supra-mental Manifestation on the Earth*' and his epic *Savitri*. In 1926, he had withdrawn himself into a solitary room and cut himself aloof completely from all Ashram activities. During this period he concentrated on his Supramental Yoga and attained many Yogic powers. But he never spoke or mentioned about them, operating all the time on the invisible planes and thus shaping events of the world. His thoughts sometimes seemed obtuse or highly critical of the existing order of things, but this was to rouse the sleeping countrymen from torpor and wake them up to new consciousness.

Aurobindo did yeomen service along with his disciple and companion, the Mother and made his Ashram at Pondicherry one of the very powerful centres which emanated vibrations to all parts of the world.

## THE MOTHER OF AROBINDO ASHRAM

The Mother (Mirra Alfassa) was born in Paris on 21st February 1878 of parents where the mother was an Egyptian and the father of Turkish extraction. As both of them were completely materialistic in their outlook, they gave to their child an education that would conform to their philosophy and outlook. So Mirra remained an atheist in her life till she became of age. She had however, many inner experiences. She had a sound training in painting, music and other fine arts. But she experienced what in modern language is known as O.B.E., or 'out of the body experiences' and wondered what they all signified. Writing later on, about her early days, she said, "Every night at the same hour when the whole house was very quiet, I would go out of my body and have all kinds of experiences. And then my body became a sleep walker (that is, the consciousness of the form became more and more conscious, while the link remained very solidly established.) I got into the habit of getting up - but not like an ordinary sleep-walker, take out a piece of paper after opening the desk and write...poems. Yes, poems, - I who had nothing of a poet in me. I would jot down things, then consciously put everything back into the drawer and go back to bed..." And again, "When I was a child of about thirteen, for nearly a year, I went out of my body and rose straight up above the house, then above the city, very high above. Then I used to see myself clad in a magnificent golden robe much longer than myself, and as I rose higher, the robe would stretch, spreading out in a circle around me to form a kind of immense roof over the city. Then I would see men, women and children, old men, the sick, the unfortunate coming out from every side they would gather under the outspread robe, begging for help, telling of their miseries, their hardships..."

The Mother recalls that at the age of eighteen, she began to have varied experiences which included memories from past lives, though without any base of intellectual knowledge. She had an intense desire to know everything round her and

to have some explanation for the experiences she was having. She goes on to say, "When I was told that the Divine was within — the teaching of the Geeta, but in words not understandable to the Westerners — that there was an inner Presence that one carried within oneself, it was a great revelation to me and I seem then to understand everything. It brought the contact immediately." Or again:

"...between the ages of 18 and 20, I had attained a constant and conscious union with the Divine Presence...and I had done this all alone without anyone's help, not even books. When a little later I chanced upon Vivekanand's 'Raja Yoga', it really seemed so wonderful to me that someone could explain something to me. And it helped me to realise in few months what would have otherwise taken me years." On another occasion she met an Indian, who told her about 'Geeta' and asked her to "Read the 'Geeta' knowing that Krishna is the symbol of the immanent God, the God within."

At this stage she began to work with Themanlys, a friend of her brother (Matteo Alfassa), who spoke about one Theon and his teachings. At this time she began to have a series of experiences and visions. In one such vision she saw Arobindo, just as he looked physically but glorified. She thought it was her 'vision attire', because she had not even heard of India except some vague description of a land full of lot of 'extraordinary things' and people with strange customs and manners. She prostrated herself before that vision in a truly Hindu manner, surprised at her own actions not knowing why she was behaving in that manner. All this had happened around 1904. Soon afterwards she went to Tlemcen in Algeria where Theon lived with his wife Madarie Theon. Theon was a European of Jewish descent. The 'Mother' immediately recognised him as a person possessing great power. He bore a certain likeness to Arobindo, but she also knew that he was not the man of her 'vision', though he had a similar profile, but 'did not have the same vibration'. Actually she met Sri Arobindo in 1914 and till then he remained a mystery to her. She worked with Theon for some two years in Tlemcen. Theon was well versed in Rig Veda and

spoke of a tradition that mentioned the Kabbala and the Vedas. Theon had written all kinds of things mostly stories to explain his views that the summit of evolution would be 'the divinisation of everything objectified.' Theon had received his initiation in India where he had worked with Madame Blavatsky, the co-founder of the Theosophical Society. Theon's wife was English. She was an extraordinary occultist and had incredible faculties. Mother has narrated a number of incidents in this connection.

She remained with the Theons and learnt and practised many things that helped her to acquire occult and mystic powers. For instance, Theon taught her how to turn aside lightening. Theon edited a magazine, 'Cosmic Review' through which he propagated his views. In his book 'The Tradition', Theon spoke about his story of Creation, which attempted to explain the process of involution, evolution of consciousness, the origin of Inconscience and the process of the descent of the divine Being into the Inconscience. Once during her work in a trance, she discovered the location of 'the mantra of life'—the mantra that has the power to create life and to withdraw it as well. Theon asked her to repeat this mantra for him. But she declined. She goes on to say that the mantra was shut up and sealed with her name on it in Sanskrit though she did not know that language at that time. Later on the Mother realised that Theon was an emanation or a vibhuti of the 'Asura' of Death. It was so designed that she should meet other Asuras also in the process of her transformation. Theon was to disappear as mysteriously as he had appeared. Madame Theon was dashed on the rocks on the Isle of Wight, while walking along the cliffs in a trance. In her death, Theon seemed to have lost his base.

In or about 1908, Mother met Paul Richard at Montmorency. She had married Henri Morisset in 1897 and the divorce had taken place in 1908. A son was born in 1898. Paul Richard was the a logian and a brilliant scholar. He had been married and had three children. There was divorce and Richard asked Mother to become his wife to which she agreed. Richard put into words and books the experiences narrated to him by 'Mother'. These are contained in his book

'The Living Ether' and 'The Gods' both in excellent French. He was an excellent scholar and a great orator. He was sent to Pondicherry to help a certain candidate during his election. There he heard of Sri Aurobindo whom he met in 1910. He returned to France with a photograph of the saint.

Mother passed through a crucial period between 1910 and 1920, a period of intensive mental studies. She made a systematic study of the religions of the world, their history and philosophy.

Mother met Aurobindo for the first time in March 1914. She at once recognised the man of her dreams and visions. The couple had to leave Pondicherry on the outbreak of war when after remaining in France for one year, they went to Japan after Richard had managed to get himself demobilised. They remained in Japan for full four years, where she became victim of a serious illness. During her stay she also suffered from tuberculosis which was cured only after her return to Pondicherry. During her stay in Japan she met the great poet Rabindra Nath Tagore, who was extremely impressed by her and invited her to come to India and join the educational institution at Shantiniketan. While in Japan, where Buddhism thrives, she is stated to have received a message from the 'Shakyamuni' on December 20, 1916, to 'return to the earth and men' and perform the appointed work. On 24th April 1920, she returned to Pondicherry and met Sri Aurobindo again, at the same place and in the same manner. Sri Aurobindo was waiting for her clad in the same manner, as if expecting her to come and join him in the task that he had undertaken.

The Mother has recounted all her experiences in her book, 'Mother's Agenda' running into many volumes, thirteen to be exact. All these works are in French. Some of them have been translated into English. All her works as well those of Sri Aurobindo are available at Mira Aditi Centre, Aspiration, Auroville, Kottakuppam, Tamil Nadu. Aurobindo's works are also available at Aurobindo Ashram Trust Pondicherry.

The work done jointly by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother reads like a saga of Yogic treatises and high mystical

philosophy. When the Master retired to a room in 1926, he entrusted everything to the Mother including the management of the activities of the Ashram. The Master and the Mother jointly propagated the practice of integrated method of Yoga, founded on the mixed truth of Nature and development of the normal processes of practices, thus developing the latent powers in man. In the first stage of this integral Yoga one has to convert entire conscious being in relation and contact with all that is considered good, beautiful and pure. In the second stage one has to transform the lower nature and merge it into the higher and rise to the sublime and beautiful. In the third and final stage, the latent powers come out in a rapid and sure manner in their best and the most beautiful, reaching perfection which is the object of integral Yoga.

The Mother admitted that "I am only realising what He has conceived. I am only the protagonist and continuant of his work." A question is often asked what exactly was the work of Sri Aurobindo and how the Mother continued it? For a full and complete reply to this question one must read the relevant writings of Sri Aurobindo and thirteen volumes of 'Mother's Agenda'. Mother's disciple Atprem has made a deep study of this question in his biography of Sri Aurobindo, titled 'Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness' and the biography of the 'Mother' in three volumes.

Mother realised the process of the Supramental descending to the body level. All the time she was conscious of the presence of the Master as if 'standing at her back' and guiding her in all her activities. Between 1962 and 1967, Mother had many experience about the mystery of and liberation from the hold of the physical mind. She underwent a training of the cells of the mind resulting in growth and development. She suffered serious bouts of illness during this period. She has said that she was at the threshold of new perceptions of life. On 1st January 1969, Mother had an experience of 'new consciousness' which she later on described as the 'consciousness of the superman', an intermediate between the divine and human being. It was a feeling of contentness, a feeling of fullness, of joy and tranquility. It

gave to the body a kind of assurance, a feeling of confidence due to the descent of Superman's consciousness.

In the political field many politicians as also Army Generals were regularly visiting the Mother to seek her guidance and blessings. In the early part of 1971 there was correspondence between the Mother and the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi. She wrote to Mother in a very respectful manner thanking her for her guidance and blessings in the conduct of the war. She closed the letter with the words, "If India is to be great, we must improve the quality of the minds of our people. I know this is your desire. In my humble way I am trying to do what I can." To this, Mother sent the following reply:

"To Indira,

With blessings. India must be proud of your leadership. Let the country take its due place in the world for showing the way towards the supreme truth.

With love

Mother."

On the seventeenth of November, 1973, the Mother laid aside her mortal coil. The breathing stopped at 7.25 p.m. Her body laid into a casket and the box was then taken to the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and on the upper chamber of the Samadhi, the body was lowered.

## SANT TIRUVALLUVAR

Some two thousand years ago, the southern part of this country was in a state of extreme prosperity. The Dravidians ruled the country and many kingdoms like Cher, Pandya, Pallava, Kadamb, Baan etc. were ruled by respective dynasties. There was internecine war amongst them, though it must be said to their credit that both temporal and spiritual matters were given equal importance. Tinevalli, Trichnopoly, Travancore and some other parts were included in the Pandya kindgom. Kulshekhar was the founder of the Pandya dynasty. He was a devotee of Lord Vishnu. During his reign art, literature and spiritual subjects received royal patronage. Tamil language had acquired unique richness. Tamil has no relation to Sanskrit and yet during this period it was extremely rich and had become an excellent vechicle for giving expression to the highest thoughts.

The capital of the kingdom of Pandya was Madura. The city was famous for organising various conferences of learned scholars on matters pertaining to literary subjects and spiritual discourses. According to records, the first such conference was held some 600 years B.C. Agattinayanar was the president of this conference. At this session discussions and studies about many well known works were undertaken. It is said that Agattinayanar was in reality Muni Agastya of the Ramayan period. He was the first to write about Tamil grammar. The first session was called 'Talaichhangam'.

The second conference (Idaicchangam) was held at Kapatpuram. At this session, there was exchange of ideas about music and drama. The third confernece, called 'Kadaicchangam', was held some two hundred years B.C. at Madura. Many eminent writers, poets, commentators and literateurs from far and wide participated in the discussions. Every writer of repute was keen to put forward his own work with a view to earn popular acclaim and its acceptance as the best work. There was keen contest all around. Many vied for being recognised as the best writer or the greatest poet.

Prominent writers of Tamil were there and every one was keenly awaiting the declaration about the best writer and poet.

At this conference stood in a corner a man with a grown beard calm and quiet. From his clothes and manner he looked like an ordinary alms-solicitor and everyone thought he had come to watch the proceedings for fun sake. Under his arms he had a bundle. No one had the time or interest in looking at this ordinary man and his presence went unnoticed. In the conference were ruling chiefs, high dignitaries and persons occupying highest seats of learning. On the main dais were placed in neat rows eminent works of art and literature along with the highest dignitaries. In the centre a seat was kept vacant, obviously as a seat of greatest honour to be occupied by the person to be declared as the most learned and pious. It was believed that Goddess Saraswati Herself presided over the conferences and was bound to give the decision acceptable to all. With great humility, the person standing in the corner moved forward and handed over his work for being considered. The President asked, "On what subject, has this book been written?" "It is about life", came the modest reply. The listeners were taken aback. How could this ordinary man write about anything. And so the President again asked, "Which particular aspect of life have you touched?". And slowly came the reply, "This work deals with all aspects of life. It is life's encyclopaedia." This caused a flutter amongst the listeners and a derisive laughter amongst a section. What audacity? A small book and he says that it contains encyclopaedic knowledge! The President opened the first page and there was a visible change on his face. Incredibility gave place to utter surprise. He could hardly believe his eyes. Was it possible that so much knowledge and wisdom could be condensed in such a small book? And he said, "Sir, I have never come across such a book. It is incredible". He read a few excerpts from the book and the entire audience listened in rapturous attention. It was indeed marvellous. Every word was like a precious jewel. They were all priceless. Everyone acclaimed it as if it was like a second Veda written in Tamil language.

The author of the book, which was compared to Vedas, belonged to the caste of untouchables. His name was Valluvar. What a difference! In the olden days, untouchables were not even entitled to listen to Vedas, much less to recite them, whereas now a member of the same class had written a book which was classed as priceless like the Vedas. Valluvar belonged to a village Maillapur near Madras. Now 'Tiru' means a 'Saint' and when prefixed to a name it means 'Saint'. Thus 'Tiru Valluvar' meant 'Saint Valluvar'. Tiru valluvar was a weaver by caste, but from his childhood he had imbibed a spiritual bent of mind. It is also said that whereas the father was Brahmin, the mother belonged to the untouchable caste. But even this woman had been brought up by a Brahmin and therefore, had developed spiritual leanings. While his father was named Bhagwan, the mother was called 'Aadi'. They had six children. Tiru Valluvar had a spiritual glow on his face which grew as each day passed. He developed a substratum of spiritual leanings even when a child. Now and again, he would also collect round him members of his caste and give discourses on religious matters. Here is a story which is both revealing and interesting.

He was sitting in the shop, busy in weaving work. His face was serene and seemed to be lost in meditation. In front of him were spread two sarees (lady's wears) which had been recently woven. About three to four wicked boys collected at the shop. One of them remarked, "He is a great Sadhu and never loses his temper, whatever the provocation." One of the boys, who belonged to a rich family, said that it could not be possible. A person must become angry when provoked. He can be tested. He approached Tiru Valluvar and enquired about the price of the sarees. Tiru replied, "Two rupees only." The boy took the saree and tore it in two parts. He said that he wanted one part only and what would be the cost then. The saint replied, "Only one rupee." The boy tore the one part into two further parts and again enquired the price. "Eight Annas only", was the reply. The saree was further torn into smaller parts and every time the boy expected the saint to flare up and shout at him. When this game was up the boy impishly said, "This saree is now torn into so many small parts that it is of no use now. I do not want to buy it any

more." And the saint said, "You are right, my son. This saree has no use now." The boy was impressed by this behaviour and said, "While it is true that this has no use now, but I am responsible for causing this damage. Here are two rupees, the price you quoted." Once again the saint said in a very quiet voice, "How can I accept the money, when the pieces of cloth have no value for you?" The boy said, "Sir, I have lots of money and two rupees will make no difference."

The saint not for once scolded him, but spoke to him in extremely affectionate terms, "My child, do you think you will ever be able to compensate for this senseless act? You see, my wife after great labour and pain, spun yarn from cotton. I dyed the yarn and then wove it on the loom after much labour and time. The idea was that someone who would wear it, could really enjoy this labour, while I would also be able to support my family. Now you have torn it into shreds. All the labour has now been wasted. How can two ruppes compensate for all this?" In Tiru Valluvar's tone there was no trace of any anguish or even reprimand, while the boy felt as if his own father was speaking to him. Tears swelled his eyes and he placed his head on the saint's feet and craved his pardon. The saint continued, "My son, if I had regretted the loss of two rupees, your life would have been reduced like the shreds of this cloth. Now that you have realised your mistake, you will never repeat such things. As for the saree, I will weave another one." And thus the chapter was closed. All the pride that the boy had vanished.

The boy returned home much chastened and narrated the whole incident to his father Elelashinjan, who was a rich merchant dealing in costly merchandize and other similar articles. He was eager to meet the saint. He made enquiries about the sage from others and was informed that Tiru Valluvar was in fact a very simple, honest and hard working person. He had no pride and treated everyone equally, rich or poor. For him all were God's creatures and as such were entitled to equal treatment. All were His children and there was no one low or high. This account impressed Elelashinjan. The father and son went to the saint's house. As the doors were opened, sound of the loom at work could easily be

heard. They quietly entered the house and saw the husband and wife absorbed in their work. But their faces had a serenity and radiance which could not be mistaken.

Tiru Valluvar welcomed them and served fruits etc. as a mark of hospitality. His humility was touching, because he knew that the visitors belonged to affluent class. Elelashingan expressed his gratitude for the inner transformation that had come about in his son. Thereafter both the father and son made it a practice to visit the house and spend time in his holy company. Once Elelashingan asked the Saint, "I have amassed lot of gold and other valuables. What shall I do with them?" Came the reply, "Throw them in the sea." Elelashingan understood what was meant. He extended his trading activity by building ships and established trade relations with many foreign countries. His profits were immense. But once when there was a famine and people started dying of starvation, he distributed his wealth on the advice of Tiru Valluvar to the poor and needy.

Tiru Valluvar compiled his sayings which were short and pithy. The book has come to be known as 'Kural'. There are three main parts of this book, 'Dharma', 'Arth' and 'Kama'. He never said anything about Moksha. "How can I write about Moksha. I know something about Dharma, about sex, about love and such matters. But Moksha? Salvation? They cannot be explained or written about." In the book 'Kural' there are 133 chapters and each chapter consists of ten short poems. This composition is also called 'Tiru Kural'.

Tiru Valluvar led an ideal house-holder's life. His wife and he were extremely devoted to each other. Speaking about marital happiness, he remarked that the wife was like Goddess Lakshmi. If she was kept happy, the home is like a heaven. On the contrary if she is neglected, the house is like a hell. His wife's name was Vasuki. She preceded her husband in death. After her demise, Tiru Valluvar renounced the world completely and took 'Sanyas' i.e. renunciation. He spent the remaining days of his life in giving religious discourses. When his end was approaching, he became

aware of it and observed, "My days are now numbered. Once the life-bird has left this tabernacle, throw it away in some forest, so that it can serve as food to animals and the bones may get mixed with mother earth."

Thus ended the life of one of the foremost saints of the South. His book 'Tirukural', has been translated into Latin, Sanskrit, French, English and German languages. It is considered a masterpiece.

## NAMMALWAR

The Alwars, twelve in number, were drawn from all castes. They have given their spiritual experience in songs in Tamil. There were twelve Alwars between the seventh and tenth centuries. They included persons from all castes and even women. Their works are collected as 'Nalaa Prabandh'. 'Alwar' literally means 'a person who has taken a plunge into the spiritual sea'. This is a treasure-house of spiritual gems and is valued as such. Icons of these Alwars are installed in many Vaishnavite temples and worshipped to this day. Their compositions are recited with great devotion. Their works are collectively regarded as extremely holy and one of them is even called '*Drawldopanishad*'.

Of these Alwars, the most renowned is Nammalwar, also called Paramkushi Muni or 'Shatakopacharya.' The Alwars are divided into three groups as under: Their Tamil and Sanskrit names are given below:

Class	Tamil Names	Sanskrit Names
Ancient	Poyagai Alwar	Saroyogin
	Bhutattar	Bhutayogin
	Peya Alwar	Mahad yogin or Bhrant Yogen
Later	Tirumalisai Alwar	Bhaktisaar
	Namm Alwar	Sathakopa Madhur Kavi Kulsekhar
Last	Periya Alwar	Vishnu Chitta
	Andal	Goda
	Tondadardippodi	Bhaktanghrienu
	Tirrupan Alwar	Yogivahan
	Tirumangai Alwar	Prakala

The dates or the years when these Alwars appeared are doubtful and scholars are not united in identifying the time when they came. The Alwars composed their songs in Tamil, popularly called 'Prabandhas'. The songs are full of piety and

devotional adoration. The contribution of these Alwar saints to Vaishnavite literature in Tamil is immense.

Nammalwar was born in Alwar Tirunagari in Tirunelveli district in Tamil Nadu. His father was ruling chief by name Kariyar and his mother was Udaya Nangai. Nammalwar was a precocious child and showed signs of great spiritual insight from his childhood and hence he was called 'Satakopa'. He remained absorbed in the Self from his childhood much to the surprise of his parents. They called him 'Maran', meaning different from ordinary children. He spoke very little and rarely opened his mouth till he was sixteen. He spent most of his time sitting under a tamarind tree near the local Vishnu shrine at Tirunagari.

His greatness was discovered by Madhur Kavi, a Brahmin saint living at Tirukoolr. Madhur Kavi had a vision of the Alwar's spiritual greatness after a visit to Ayodhya, when he was bidden to go to Tirunagari and meet Nammalwar. Madhur Kavi prostrated himself before Nammalwar and begged to be accepted as a disciple. The Alwar continued to lead his life living under the tree and continue his meditation. His poems are called Arthpanchakam describing the nature of soul and the glory of God, the goal of life and the means of attaining spiritual ascendancy. He was a great devotee of Lord Krishna and his bhakti was of the 'Sakhyam' bhava. He is held in the highest esteem amongst the mystic saints of Vaishnavism. He is indeed the founder-saint of Vaishnavi theology which was later propounded by the Vedantic school of Ramanujacharya and earlier systemised by Shankara in his Absolutist philosophy.

Collection of the hymns sung by the Alwar is known as 'Divya Prabandham' or the Divine Poems. It is divided into four parts, each containing four thousand stanzas, each part containing one thousand. The teachings contained therein are called the 'Imre Rahvayam' or mystic secrets. Sri Nammalwar is credited with the authorship of the third thousand known as 'Tiruvoimoli' and parts of the 'Four Thousand'. By this is meant that the collection of hymns sung by the Alwars are called 'Divya Prabandham'. It is

divided into four parts, each consisting of about one thousand stanzas. It is therefore, called 'Nalayira Prabandham' meaning the book of four thousand hymns. The 'Tiruvoimoli' is supposed to contain the essence of Sama-Veda ranked as an Upanishad. Many subsequent writers have written scholarly commentaries thereon.

Nammalwar has propounded his philosophy in his poems, which are considered extremely sacred even to this day. Narayan is the Lord and the Supreme Reality. The matter and the souls are his attributes (Visheshana). Their cosmic functions constitute His Leela or Sport. Absolute surrender is the only means of reaching Him. His attitude towards Lord Krishna is that of bridal mysticism. He says, "When the immortal bliss of Brahman is there, it is a wonder, how anyone can run after the fleeting pleasures that inevitably end in pain... See God, sing His glory, surrender to Him, and chant His name repeatedly... He will protect and save you."

This message has benefitted many.

## SRI MANICKAVASAGAR OR MANIKKAVACHAKAR

In the South, two powerful streams of spiritual approach to God can be seen. These streams became known as Vaishnavism and Shaivism. Followers of the former were deeply immersed in the Bhakti path and worshipped Lord Vishnu and His numerous Avatars mainly Ram and Krishna. The others known as Shaivites held Lord Shiva as the Supreme Godhead and followed the 'Gyan Marg' or the path of Knowledge and Wisdom. The former include many notable saints and their mystics were known as Alwars, which were twelve in number. Their philosophy later on was combined to be known as Vishishtadwaita. The Shaivites and their leaders of eminent reputation like Adi Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya and Madhwacharya and many other prominent teachers were called Nayanawars. Some other important saints are Appar Sambandar and Manickavasagar or Manikkavachakkar. The hymns of all these saints are highly venerated and their idols can be seen in many Shiva temples in the South. These saints blended both Gyan and Bhakti philosophies and propounded theistic philosophies and thoughts.

Amongst these, Manikkavachakar's compositions are rated very high. 'Tiruvachakam', 'Tiruvembava' and 'Tirukkovaiya' are collections of excellent devotional songs, which propound the noblest mystical truths.

Manikkavachakar was born at a place called Tiruvaduvur in the neighbourhood of Madurai (Tamil Nadu), the then capital of Pandya kingdom. His father Sambhupadasritar belonged to the Amatya clan from amongst whom the king selected his Ministers. His mother's name was Sivajnanavati. His exact year of birth is controversial, though some scholars have suggested the period between 660-690 A.D. Earlier, he was called Tiruvaduvurar after his birth place. By the age of sixteen he had learnt all the scriptural texts and had

acquired the reputation of being a great scholar. He possessed great poetical instincts and had a sweet and musical voice. His fame reached the king who called him and was so impressed that he straightaway appointed him as his Chief Minister, conferring on him the title—'Tennava Brahmarayan'. Tiruvaduvurar soon established himself as a very capable administrator. But his spiritual urge made him restless and he wanted a Guru or Master who could initiate him to his order. He did not have to wait for long. This is how he found his Master and Teacher:

The King assigned to him the job of proceeding towards an eastern port with the direction to purchase some horses which were on sale by some foreign tradesmen. He carried with himself enormous money and was accompanied by a large retinue of soldiers. He offered worship at the shrine of 'Chokkanath (Shiva)' at Madurai and inwardly prayed that he should have the good fortune of finding the Master during this journey. After a long travel, he came to Tirupperunturai, the sea-port town and heard the chant of Vedic hymns. In the direction of the hymns, he found a great Yogi or mystic saint reposing in a cave. He had a very radiant and majestic face. Tiruvaduvurar prostrated himself before him and sang devotional songs. He surrendered himself completely to the Yogi and forgot all about the purpose of his journey. It is said that the Yogi was no other than Lord Shiva Himself. He felt very pleased and addressed Tiruvaduvurar as 'Manikkavacchaka' meaning 'one whose words are ruby-like'. Thus Tiruvaduvurar came to be called Manikkavachakkar. He adopted a mendicant's life and joined one of the groups of Shiva devotees and spent all the money he had brought from the King's treasury on feeding the Shiva-devotees and in renovating the Shiva temple at Tirupperunturai. His entourage finding him in this condition returned to Madurai and brought the matter to the notice of the King. The King became very angry and sent urgent summons to Tiruvaduvurar to return to the capital at once with the horses or with the money taken by him. Tiruvaduvurar prostrated before the Master and sought his guidance. He was asked to comply with the summons and inform the King

that the horses would arrive on the day of Avani Moolam. (Avani is the name of month in Tamil corresponding to August-September). The Yogi also handed over a precious ruby to be presented to the King.

As instructed, Manikkavachakar returned to Madurai and saw the king and informed him that the horses would reach the capital on the said day. The present in the form of the costly ruby was also offered. The king was highly pleased and had no doubt in his mind about the arrival of the horses. When the appointed day was about to come, the king's spies reported that there was no sign of the horses. The king became furious and imprisoned Tiruvaduvurar. But on the appointed day, the horses arrived in Madurai city. Strange looking foreigners were leading the animals. The king was highly pleased and ordered immediate release of his ex-Chief Minister. Many miraculous events have been narrated in respect of the leader of the horses and subsequent praise and condemnation of Manikkavachakar.

The saint then returned to Tiruperunturi where he had met his Master for the first time and saw him. The saint afterwards visited all the other shrines and sang the devotional songs composed by him in praise of Lord Shiva. At Tiruvannmalai, he composed his famous work 'TiruvembavaI'. He visited other holy places also. At Chidambaram, where he entered the sacred shrine of the Cosmic Dancer, he fell into a trance and then realised the true three-fold representation of the Lord as (i) in the form of Natraj, (ii) as the Moolsthana Linga (iii) and then as Akasha known as Chidambar-rahasya. He lived there and practised Shiva-Yoga. He spread Shiva-Siddhanta. Lord Shiva is 'Pati' or Master and the Jiva is 'Pashu' and thus Shiva is Pashupati.

While living at Chidambaram, the saint composed most of his songs while practising Shiva-Yoga Tiruvacchakam, meaning 'Blessed utterances', are the collection of his songs and hymns. At this time an interesting incident occurred. The King of Ceylon visited Chidambaram and met the saint. He had a daughter, who was dumb. The saint cured her by

his occult powers. This filled the king with great joy and gratitude. He became the saint's follower and staunch Saivite.

Manikkavachakar propounded his Saiva-siddhant which is highly prized even today. He was held in high esteem by followers of Truth and Mysticism.

## BHAKTA KAMBAN

In 1954, All India Radio, Madras put on the air, in the months of July and August, a series of talks by the eminent politician and the first Indian Governor-General of India, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari. The series included talks on Ramayan by Kamban. These talks were later compiled into a book, titled 'Bharat Milap', published by the Publications Division of the Government of India. Its Introduction was written by the then President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Kamban's 'Ramayan' written in Tamil is as popular in that region as is Tulsi Das' 'Ram Charit Manas' in northern India in the Hindi speaking belt.

Like many others not much information is available about the childhood of Kamban. In the Chol kingdom, in a town called Tiruvallundur, Kamban was born sometime in the eighth century A.D. His father's name was Adban who was a priest in the royal court. From early childhood Kamban was found to be greatly devoted to Lord Rama. The famous Vaishnav saint Nammalwar was his spiritual preceptor. 'Ramayan' had been originally written by the great poet-saint Valmiki in Sanskrit, but not everyone was conversant with this language.

There were earlier books like 'Tolkappiyam' written in Tamil. But it was left to Kamban to write the Lord's story in Tamil sometime in 880 A.D. Five years later i.e. in 885 A.D. the Literary Society of Srirangam acknowledged Kamban's 'Ramayan' as a supremely authoritative work and conferred on him the title of Kavi-chakravarti. The language, style and method of presentation as adopted by Kamban were considered excellent and his greatness as Kavi-chakravarti was acknowledged by all contemporary poets like Otakkutari, who was himself writing about Rama and had completed Baalkarid. But when he came across Kamban's 'Ramayan', he gave up writing on the subject any further. Otakkutari was advanced in age and was quite proud of his literary achievements, but when he saw Kamban's book, all his pride melted and he welcomed Kamban's 'Ramayan' heartily.

Kamban's 'Ramayan' has been written in the metre popularly called 'Vriddha'. It is true that all the material for writing the book has been taken from Valmiki's 'Ramayan'. Valmiki has presented Ram as an ideal person, firm in the observance of duties and always acting within the framework of strict and rigid principles. But Kamban has presented Him as an incarnation of God and a divine person. The poet's supremacy as a story-teller with lucid description of the incidents touch the very core of the readers' hearts. The lyrical poems that seem to sound like music are all superb. There are slight variations in the incidents given by Valmiki and Kamban. In the latter's work, events have been given so as to give an air of romance. When Vishwamitra leaves for Mithila to attend Seeta's Swayamvar, the reputation of Ram and his brother Lakshman, as two handsome and brave princes, had already preceded them and the whole population was looking forward eagerly to behold the two princes. Seeta was also affected by this popular enthusiasm and waited in her garden to have a glimpse of the young princes. Vishwamitra, as if in league with the popular sentiments, took the same path adjoining the garden where Seeta was waiting anxiously. Ram and Seeta saw each other. Ram stopped for a while to prolong the moment. The poet suggests that love had blossomed in the two hearts at that very moment. Again when Shiva's bow was picked up by Ram, it seemed as if it was a garland of scented flowers, light and delicate and Seeta felt as if it was the garland she was going to place round the neck of her future lord and husband, Ram.

Valmiki's Ravan is again a very learned person, well-versed in holy scriptures and Vedas. He had done penance at the foot of Kailash mountain and had obtained many boons from Lord Shiva. He had conquered all the regions, earth, heaven and the nether lands. Devas were afraid of him. When Shoorpanakha, Ravan's sister, with her nose cut by Ram's brother Lakshman, entered Rayan's court, he remained grave and stern, but never lost his composure. Kamban has described this event in a different manner. When Shoorpanakha entered the city, bleeding and wounded,

the townspeople were stunned. When she entered her brother's court, he was furious and enquired, who had invited death for himself. Even the Gods trembled before him and how could any one dare to insult his own sister. The entire episode has been presented in such an absorbing manner that the reader is at once impressed immensely. In the end, when Ravan's friends and relatives counsel him to have peace with Ram and return Seeta with full honour, Ravan says in a very heroic manner, "If I die at the hands of Ram, my name will become immortal and will always be uttered whenever Ram's name is mentioned. All have to die one day and so will I. But a death at the hands of Ram will be a glorious death indeed."

In subsequent years, Kamban's 'Ramayan' was recited regularly in temples and other places of worship. Once it was so done in a temple where a huge statue of Lion-God, 'Narsimh' was installed. Kamban was himself a devotee of this form of God and when in the book a reference came about this incarnation, people thought that there was a mild laughter coming out of the mouth of the Lion-God. It was a recognition of Kamban's greatness as a poet and narrator of incidents.

## ADI SHANKARACHARYA

A Brahmin couple belonging to Nambudripads lived in a village named Kalady situated on the banks of river Purna in Kerala. Shivaguru and Aryamba, as the husband and wife were called, led a happy life, but felt that their happiness was incomplete in the absence of progeny. They practised severe austerities in the hope of getting a son, but without success.

There was a Shiva temple on the nearby mountain range, Chandramauli. Aryamba persuaded her husband to pray to Lord Shiva to grant them a son. Shivaguru agreed with this suggestion. Both went to the temple and commenced worship of the Lord with great devotion. They chanted holy name 'Shiva-Har Shankar' continuously and thought of nothing else except the Lord's name. It is said that the Lord was pleased with their devotion and appeared to them in a dream taking the form of a holy Brahmin. They were asked the reason for observing such severe austerities. The couple replied that they had no son. All the comforts of life were available to them, but in the absence of a son, their house was in complete wilderness. The Brahmin enquired what they wanted? A son or a daughter? And Shivaguru said that they desired a son as according to the famous Sanskrit dictum, "Pumnam Narkat Trayate Sah putrah", meaning that only a son rescues from going to hell. The couple declared that they would be happy to have even one son, who would be illustrious and earn fame and name rather than have many children steeped in wickedness. The Brahmin blessed them to have a son, who would live up to age of thirty-two, but in that period he would perform great deeds and leave behind a name that would live.

On their return home, Aryamba soon felt that the blessings were going to be true as she developed signs of pregnancy. But during this period she had strange desires, like taking bath three times a day, visiting holy places and temples and waring ochre coloured sarees. It is not certain when the birth actually took place, but according to the

Hindu calender the year was Nandana, Vaishakh, Punarvasu Nakshatra and the tithi was Panchami Shukla paksha (bright half). The year is placed as 788 A.D. On the twelfth day when the naming ceremony was held, the child was named 'Shankar', as it was believed that the child was on account of the blessing of Lord Shiva. 'Sham' means 'kalyan' or welfare and 'Kar' means 'doer' and thus 'Shankar' meant 'one who was born to ensure welfare of the humanity'. Pandits were called to cast the child's horoscope. They predicted that the boy was no ordinary person and he was going to become an illustrious and learned person and his name would live till eternity.

Shankar was recognised as a precocious child. His 'Upnayan' or thread ceremony was performed when he was only five. When the sacred Gayatri Mantra was whispered into his ears, his face beamed with a divine light. He also commenced study of the Vedas and discharged his obligations as a disciple in an exemplary manner. He was regular in his studies and other routines of the Ashram and served his teacher with great devotion. Shankar studied all the four Vedas. His inner qualities like quick understanding and good memory soon impressed his teacher. He recognised that his disciple was no ordinary human being. He showed evidence of his future qualities of describing all theological matters with great erudition, in a systematic and orderly manner. Included in his duties as a disciple was also the task of going round many houses and beg alms. Those days, it was the custom for every householder to keep away some food for needy persons. Shankar called at the house of a nearby Brahmin family. Only the lady was present and she came out to see the boy begging food. Shankar was just seven then, but he had such an effulgence that he radiated light. The lady was sorry to find that there was no food available except a solitary fruit 'Aonla' which she offered. Shankar was greatly grieved to see the poverty of the family and sang a shloka in praise of Goddess Lakshmi. The Goddess appeared and on the request of Shankar blessed the lady with all material comforts and prosperity.

At the age of seven Shankar had mastered all the holy Shastras and Upnishads. He soon developed a great desire

to take 'Sanyas' or renunciation of the world. He expressed his desire before his mother who was now old. Shankar's father had died soon after his birth and Aryamba had no one else except her son. How could she permit him to renounce the world when she was dreaming of finding a suitable spouse for her son. But sometimes strange things occur. Once when the mother and son were bathing in the Purna river, Shankar shouted for help and implored his mother to come to his rescue as a crocodile had caught his legs. While struggling with the crocodile, Shankar informed his mother that evil destiny could be averted if he became a monk and the mother had no choice, but to give her permission. On hearing his mother, Shankar kicked the crocodile with great strength and thus secured freedom from the jaws of death. Having obtained his mother's permission, Shankar assured her that he would ensure that she did not suffer from any material wants. He also assured her that he would come to her when her end was near, as soon as she thought of him.

At the age of eight Shankar left his house in search of a Master. He travelled far and wide visiting places in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and finally to Gujarat. While going along the banks of river Narmada, he came across a deep forest. Without any fear, he went inside the thick jungle and found many caves where hermits were engaged in severe austerities. He entered a particular Ashram where Shri Guru Govindnath was lost in deep meditation. Shankar on seeing him prostrated before the figure and remained sitting with folded hands. Shri Guru was beaming with divine effulgence and sitting completely harmonised with his surroundings. Guru Govindnath came out of his Samadhi and saw the small figure of a boy sitting before him with folded hands. Shankar spontaneously recited a poem in praise of the Guru, who was greatly impressed and enquired about the purpose of his visit. Shankar replied with great humility that he was roaming about in search of a Guru, who could explain to him the Adwait philosophy. He requested the Guru to accept him as his disciple and initiate him into the mysteries of divine and occult knowledge. Shankar was permitted to live in the Ashram where he lived for some three

years, studying hard and devoting all his time and energy at his Master's feet. The basic knowledge about Adwait philosophy, Upanishads and other Shastras was quickly grasped by Shankar, as his power in this respect were unique. The Guru felt extremely impressed by his progress and conferred on him the degree of 'Acharya' meaning 'Professor'. Shankar was now known as 'Shankaracharya'. As instructed by his Guru, Shankaracharya left the confines of the Ashram and headed towards Kashi (modern Varanasi).

Shankaracharya, with his learned discourses, made an immediate impression on the masses who gathered to hear him. His voice, manner of presenting his thoughts and ideas were unique. In a short time he was recognised as a great Master. A story surrounds his stay at Kashi. Once after taking his bath in the holy Ganges, Shankaracharya saw a 'Chandaal' (a low-caste person) followed by four dogs. He belonged to the class of untouchables. So Shankaracharya asked him to get aside and not even touch him. The Chandaal politely replied, "Who is 'I' and who is 'you'? If you mean the soul, it cannot be made unholy and if you are referring to the body, it is inert and lifeless and therefore cannot be polluted." Shankaracharya realised that the other person was no ordinary human being and prostrated before him. The Chandaal was Lord Shiva Himself and had come to test Shankaracharya. With the vision of the Lord, Shankaracharya felt purified and blessed for his future endeavours. The Lord commanded that Shankaracharya should write a thesis on Adwait and write a commentary of Brahma-sutras. 'Brahma Satyam Jagan Mithya', only the universal energy is true and the rest is all false. Shankaracharya completed his commentary when he was at Badrinath for some three years. This place is considered very holy and it is even said that Nar and Narayan did austerities and Tapasya at this place.

It is said that while the Acharya was at Kashi, a Brahmin whose face glowed with knowledge and wisdom, engaged him in a discussion. He was no ordinary Brahmin, but Rishi Veda Vyasa himself. When Shankaracharya recognised him, he apologised for entering into discussion with him, but the Rishi blessed him and wished him success in all his

undertakings. Shankaracharya was just sixteen then and expressed a wish to end his life by taking samadhi in the Ganges as his work was now over. Rishi Vyas strongly disapproved of this step and said that with Lord Shiva's grace he had yet to live for another sixteen years and had much work to do.

Kumaril Bhatt was a great protagonist of Vedic Dharma and opponent of Buddhist philosophy. In a discussion with Dharmapal, a renowned scholar of Buddhistic philosophy, he turned the tables and Dharmpal acknowledged defeat. He assailed Jain philosophy also during his travels in Karnatak and other states in the South. He thus proved a great asset for furthering the cause and philosophy of Shankaracharya. Another renowned scholar of the time was Mandan Mishra. He had written a treatise on Mimansa and had spoken highly of the '*Pravitti Marg*' i.e. material world and Karma-kaand as laid down by the Vedas. Shankaracharya realised that for furthering his philosophy of Adwait he must win over a person like Mandan Mishra. A debate was arranged. The story surrounding this debate is equally interesting.

Shankaracharya did not know the residence of Mandan Mishra. So he enquired from some women whom he met to be guided to the desired house. They laughed and said that where one found even the parrots and other birds discussing Vedas, that was sure to be the house of Mandan Mishra. Acharya reached the place, but was stopped by the door-keeper posted at the gate, who informed him that a Shraddha ceremony was going on inside the house and no one was permitted to distract. Shankaracharya, due to the Yogic powers he possessed, effected his entrance through a window. Mandan Mishra was aghast to see the young man enter unannounced and curtly asked him to leave the premises. Vyas Muni was also present there. He told Mishra that he should recognise greatness where it existed and invite the young man, who was renowned for his learning, wisdom and creative thinking. Both the persons were diametrically opposed in the views held by them. One believed in Karma-kand, Vedas and Pravitti-marg, whereas the other was purely an

intellectual of the highest order and a great original thinker believing in Nivritti-Marg.

A renowned lady Bharti Devi was selected as the judge to decide the outcome of the debate. Both persons placed their views with great force and supported them with suitable references. Mandan Mishra lived at Mahishmati. All the learned men and scholars came to witness the debate. Mandan Mishra was a great exponent of Vedantic philosophy and considered the Sanyasins as renegades. Shankaracharya on the other hand was a scholar and original thinker and propagated the philosophy of Adwait or Monism. The debate lasted for quite some days. Each of the contestant was given a garland to wear and the one whose garland remained fresh would be declared the winner. Shankaracharya accepted the challenge. It was also stipulated that if he lost, he would renounce celibacy and marry a girl and become a house holder, whereas Mandan Mishra in the event of defeat would give up his family life and take to Sanyas. In the end Shankaracharya won the wager and was declared triumphant. Mandan Mishra now declared his intention to become a disciple of Shankaracharya. Later on he was known as Sureshwaracharya and became the first pontiff of the Sringeri Peeth.

Mandan Mishra's wife Saraswati Devi was a very learned lady and had studied all the Shastras and scriptures. She told Shankaracharya that his victory would be incomplete unless she too was defeated in debate. The Acharya was challenged to answer her questions. After some casual questions, she asked him to speak about sex, "What is the nature of Cupid? How does a woman feel when it is bright moon and the waning moon?" Shankaracharya was completely stunned, because here was a field to which he was a complete stranger. He begged to be allowed to come after six months when he would provide answers to these questions. During his wanderings he came across a kingdom whose young king had died. His ministers, family members and courtiers were standing round the dead body preparing for his cremation. Shankaracharya had a certain idea. He went to a nearby state and due to his immense yogic powers, he

left his body there and entered the body of the dead king, who came to life immediately. His people were overjoyed to see him alive and took him in an elephant procession to the palace. The king with an exalted soul did many things for the good and happiness of his people and enjoyed the luxury of his palace and his harem. Having found answers to all the questions that Mandan Mishra's wife had put to him, he re-entered his own body and came to Mahishmati to meet Bharati Devi. She was completely subdued and became his disciple. She also went to Sringeri. A monument stands there even today to commemorate her presence.

Shankaracharya commenced his wanderings once again. He had a premonition that his mother was ill and so rushed to her side as had promised her. She was extremely ill and embraced her son lovingly. Her last wish was that her funeral pyre should be lit by her son. Shankaracharya instantly agreed and did accordingly. Many a head were raised in dissent, but Shankaracharya could not be dissuaded.

Shankaracharya resumed his travels after the funeral obsequies of his mother were completed. Many an evil had crept into the society under Buddhist influence. The society had become corrupt and demoralised. Shankaracharya strove hard to re-establish faith in Upanishads. The Kapaliks in Assam had devised new methods of Tantric worship and even human sacrifice was prevalent on a wide scale. Shankaracharya denounced these practices and incurred the displeasure of Tantriks and Kapaliks, specially in Assam. Attempts were made by them to kill the Acharya, but his devoted disciple Padmapad came to his rescue. While he was at Kamrup he engaged Abhinav Gupta, a Shakta and Tantric expert, and defeated him in arguments. Abhinava Gupta tried his black magic resulting in physical harm to Shankaracharya, who started vomiting blood. He was however, devotedly nursed by Padamapad and soon recovered.

Shankaracharya visited Srirangam, Jambukeshwaram, Tirupati and other holy places. It is now recognised that while at Tiruvottiyur, near Madras, he brought a change in the mode of worship by prohibiting animal sacrifice. From

there he proceeded to the northern parts of the country by the eastern coast. Shankaracharya established Maths or monasteries at Badrinath, Dwarka, Sringeri, Puri and Kanchi. The heads of these Maths have been named after him. These Peeths or Maths have functioned now for centuries and go to show what firm foundations had been laid by the founder. The Sanyasins who are followers of Shankaracharya are called Dashnamis, because they are known by the ten appellations, viz. Teerth, Ashram, Vana, Aranya, Giri, Parvat, Sagar, Saraswati, Bharati and Puri.

These ten orders created by Shankaracharya can be defined as below:

- (i) **Ashram:** One who is free from bonds and is confined to Ashram and has embraced Sanyas.
- (ii) **Bharati:** One who is fully laden with learning.
- (iii) **Giri:** One who lives in forest and is steady.
- (iv) **Parvat:** One who lives in forest and has steadfast knowledge about the transient nature of the mundane world.
- (v) **Puri:** One who is full of real knowledge and has mastered the knowledge of Brahman and is as such in union with the Parabrahman.
- (vi) **Saraswati:** One who is devoted to knowledge of tunes and is also called Lord of poets.
- (vii) **Sagar:** One who knows not only the full depths of oceans of truth, but has also dived to the bottom and collected jewels of knowledge.
- (viii) **Teerth:** One who takes bath at the confluence of three rivers in the form of knowledge and the realisation of truth.
- (ix) **Aranya:** He always lives in the realisation of identity of his self with the universal self.
- (x) **Vana:** One who has transcended the snares of desires and resides in a forest.

Shankaracharya had four famous disciples viz., Padampad, Hasta-bhashak, Sureshwar and Totak. The centre he established in the North was Badri or Jyotirmath, one in East at Puri was known as Goverdhan Math, in the West at Dwarka was called Sharda Peeth and the one in the South at Sringeri was called Sringeri Peeth. Members of the orders mentioned above had to attach themselves to one of these Maths. Padampad had two sets of disciples, whose names were suffixed with 'Teerth' and 'Ashram'. Hasta-bhashak had those whose name ended with 'Van' and 'Aranya', Sureshwar had three categories whose names ended with suffixes 'Saraswati', 'Puri' and 'Bharati', whereas Totak had also three categories viz. 'Giri', 'Parvat' and 'Sagar'. Joshi-math was assigned to Giri, Parvat and Sagar; Sharda-peeth at Dwarka assigned to Ashram and Teerth; Goverdhan Math at Puri had Aranya and Vana and Sringeri had Puri, Bharati and Saraswati. The Dashnamis greet each other generally with 'Namo-Narayan'.

Shankaracharya also assigned aphorisms called 'Maha-vakyas' to the four Maths, as under:

Jyotirmath	:	Aham Ayam Brahma	(This Self is Brahman)
Sharda Math	:	Tat Twam Asi	(That Thou Art)
Sringeri	:	Aham Brahmosmi	(I am Brahman)
Dwarka	:	Pradnyanam Brahma	(True knowledge is Brahma)

Shankaracharya's end was as mysterious as his life had been. When only thirty-two he retired to a cave in the Himalayas, permitted none of his disciples to follow him and disappeared from there for ever. Madame Blavatsky says the following about his end:

"Is he dead? Tradition and popular belief answer in the negative and some of the local Gurus, if they do not emphatically corroborate, do not deny the rumour. The truth with its mysterious details as given to the direct followers of the great Dravidian Guru..... Still it is known that the Adept of Adepts lives to this day as a mysterious

unseen yet overpowering presence among the Brotherhood at Shamballa, beyond, far beyond the snowy-capped Himalayas."

Shankaracharya has been one of the greatest Initiates living in possession of the exoteric as well as esoteric knowledge. The only other similar instance one can recall is of Dnyaneshwar, who was born some five hundred years later. At the age of fifteen he gave to posterity Dnyaneshwari and took Samadhi by entering a cave when he was twenty-one.

Sir William Jones has called Shankaracharya, "The incomparable Shankaracharya". The Tibetans take him to be an incarnation of Lord Buddha. There is some substance in this belief. If there is a power that sends to the earth its representative (messenger) or incarnates Himself, the purpose is the same as stated by Lord Krishna, "*Yada Yada Hi Dharmasya glanirbhavati Bharat, Abhyuthanm M dharmasya, tadaatmanam Srijamyaham*" (Whenever there is decay of righteousness, I incarnate from age to age). Lord Buddha came when the society was the victim of Brahminical tyranny and many evils had crept in society. He had to demolish the old order with a view to create a new one. But after His departure, Buddhism decayed in the land of its birth and wicked ways were adopted. To cleanse the society, another Messenger had to come in the form of Shankaracharya to revive the old teachings and impart new life to the decaying religion. No wonder therefore, that he is regarded as a successor to Buddha. Shankaracharya was a great Vedantic scholar and had studied religion both in its exoteric and esoteric forms. Shankaracharya has also been called 'Shanmat' Sthapanacharya' because he founded the six religious cults as under:

1. Ganapatyam : about Lord Ganesh.
2. Kaumaram : about Subrahmanyam or Murugan
3. Vaishnavam : about Sub-sects of Lakshmi, Narshimh and Ram
4. Sauram : about Sun
5. Saktam : about Shakti
6. Shaivam : about Lord Shiva

He also started a Pooja of Panchayatan with the five deities placed on a pedestal with one occupying the central position, this being done in turns. He was responsible for systemizing the wisdom contained in the Upanishads about whom Schopenhauer remarks, "In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so devastating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life, and it will be the solace of my death." He again remarks, "I get more out of one page of the ancient Hindu books than I do out of ten volumes of European philosophy after Kant." It is also noteworthy that Shankaracharya wrote so many books of unmatched excellence in such a short time when we think that Spencer took 43 years to write his book 'Synthetic Philosophy'.

Shankaracharya wrote many commentaries known as Shankar Bhashya. These are 'Geeta Bhashya', 'Upanishad Bhasya', 'Brahma Sutra Bhashya', 'Mandukyakarika Bhashya', 'Vishnu Sahsranam Bhasya', 'Sanatsujatiya Bhashya', 'Saundarya Lahiri' 'Updesh Lahiri' etc. No ordinary mortal could have given so much spiritual wealth to posterity as did Shankaracharya. To quote Madame H.P. Blavatsky once again,

"Shankar was an Avatar in the full sense of the term. According to Sayanacharya, the great commentator on the Vedas, he is to be held as an Avatar or direct incarnation of Shiva—the Logos of the Seventh Principle in Nature—himself. In the Secret Doctrine, Shri Shankaracharya is regarded as the above—for the thirty-two years of his mortal life, of a Flame, the highest of the manifested Spiritual Beings, one of the Primordial Seven Rays."

The philosophy that was systematised by Shankaracharya was the Adwait philosophy. It is wrong to consider him the founder of this system of philosophy, as some people erroneously think. Adwait philosophy will be discussed in a separate chapter along with Dwait, Vishishtadwait and Shudh Adwait philosophy.

## RAMANUJACHARYA

Sriperumbudur lies about forty kilometres west of Madras, where Asuri Kesava Somayaji, also known as Sarvakratu Dikshitar, lived with his wife Kantimati, a grand-daughter of the great Yamunacharya. To this couple was born Ramanujacharya in 1017 A.D. He had his early education under his father, who was said to be an Advaitin. At the age of fourteen, he went to Kancheepuram and was admitted to a school, where he studied along with his cousin Govinda. The school was run by another Advaitin, Yadava Prakasha. Ramanujacharya was not satisfied with some of the explanations given by his teacher about scriptural texts.

At this time there were two sets of teachers among the Vaishnavas of the South, viz. the Alwars and the Acharyas. The Alwars, twelve of whom are famous, were remarkable for their simple compositions in Tamil, singing the glory of Lord Vishnu. People of all classes and creeds including the so-called lower castes joined them in great numbers. The second class viz Acharyas carried out controversies and disputations and sought to establish their own supremacy. The first such Acharya was Nathmuni, whose successor was Yamunacharya, also known as Aalbandaar. He succeeded him in 973 or thereabout. It is said that the local ruler asked Yadava Prakash to see his daughter and drive out the evil spirit which had possessed her. Prakash failed, but Ramanujacharya succeeded in doing so, much to the consternation of his teacher. News about the brilliance of Ramanujacharya reached Yamunacharya, who came down to Kancheepuram *in-cognito* to find out if the boy was suitable to succeed him. He returned fully satisfied.

Ramanujacharya set out on a journey to Benaras accompanied by Govind. On the way he was warned by his cousin that some members of the party were hostile to him and wanted to kill him. Thus warned, Ramanujacharya retraced his steps and was led and guided by a hunter and his wife, who disappeared when they reached the outskirts

of Kancheepuram. Ramanujacharya realised that his guides were no other than Lord Varadaraja. The spot where Ramanujacharya realised this truth, became extremely holy for him. He used to carry pitchers of water to the place, where his friend and guide vanished from view. Ramanujacharya became aware of an inner transformation and he decided to spend all his life in the service of the Lord.

He was twenty-five at that time. He was married at this time in compliance with the wishes of his mother and led the life of a householder. He came under the influence of Tirukkachi Nambi, who was an extremely devoted person. Yamunacharya apprehending his approaching end sent one of his disciples, Mahapoorna, to bring Ramanujacharya in order to instal him as his successor. Before Ramanujacharya reached Srirangam, Yamunacharya passed away, but had left three things to be done by his successor. The first was that Ramanujacharya should apply himself assiduously to the study and explanation of Vedant Sutras, Upanishads and Bhagwat Geeta. The second injunction was to popularize the Divya Prabandhas. The third was that Ramanujacharya should form a band of devoted and disciplined followers, who should undertake popularisation of Vaishnavism. Ramanujacharya took a vow to follow the commands of his Master while paying his respects before the dead body.

Ramanujacharya returned to Kancheepuram to consult his guide and preceptor Tirukkachi Nambi about his future course of action. Nambi told him to completely surrender himself to the Lord. No half-baked steps would do. He was also told to go to Srirangam and meet Mahapoorna who would initiate him. Ramanujacharya set out for Srirangam and was met in the way by Mahapoorna himself, who was coming down to meet him. Ramanujacharya was initiated as a monk in the famous temple of Sri Ram at Madurankam. Ramanujacharya's wife did not approve of her husband's ways. She behaved in a crude manner with Mahapoorna, who left the house. She similarly quarrelled with Nambi, when her husband was away, because he was not a Brahmin. Ramanujacharya decided to break way from his wife. He was then thirty-two. He went to the shrine of Lord Varadaraj and

there wore ochre clothes as a mark of renunciation. Thereafter he earned the title of 'Yatiraj', the prince amongst ascetics.

Ramanujacharya lived in Srirangam for nearly fifty years except for short periods when he went out on pilgrimage. He had visited Rameshwaram as well as Badrinath in the north. He travelled from the west coast and returned from the east coast. While at Srinagar in Kashmir, where he was able to procure a copy of 'Bodhyan Vritti', which is a commentary on Brhma Sutras. Ramanujacharya wrote his commentary on Brahma Sutras followed by his 'Sri Bhashyam'. Amongst his other works are the commentaries on 'Bhagwat Geeta', 'Vedanta Deep', 'Vedanta Sara', 'Vedartha Sangrah' and 'Gadya Traha'. Ramanujacharya had a number of followers in the south as well as north. The two schools are known by the names of Vadakalai or northern learning and Tenkalai or southern learning. The basic difference between the two schools is the mode of devotion that they preach. The Bhakti or devotion to God is 'Markat Bhakti' when the devotee is like the baby monkey, who clings to the back or abdomen of his mother and 'Marjar Bhakti' where the kitten is held fast in the jaws of the mother.

On return to Srirangam, Ramanujacharya found that the then ruling king was antagonist and persecuted the Vaishnavites. Ramanujacharya was advised to leave Srirangam. He went to Mysore territory where the ruler Bitti Deva, who was a Jain, became converted to Vaishnavism and became a disciple of Ramanujacharya. A temple was constructed at Melkote, dedicated to the worship of Lord Vishnu. After the death of Kulothunga I, Ramanujacharya was requested to return to Srirangam. He was 102 years old then and lived for another eighteen years at Srirangam. He passed away in 1137. His last words to his disciples, who had collected when his end was near, are examples of humility. He said:

"My friends, at this moment, I am fully aware of all my weaknesses and failings. I know that on several occasions I have caused you pain, willingly or unwittingly. I ask you for forgiveness without which I cannot leave this world in peace."

Ramanujacharya had developed many occult powers, but he never mentioned or spoke about them. He exemplified in his life the famous saying that 'man may make miracles, but miracles do not make a man.' Ramanujacharya is known as the founder of Vishishta-dwaita principle, which enhances the understanding of Shankaracharya's Adwait.

## MADHWACHARYA OR ANANDATIRTHA

Not far from Udupi is a village called Shivalli or Rajataapeethpuram, in South Canara where Madhwacharya was born on the Vijayadashmi day in 1199 A.D. His childhood name was Vasudeva. Madhwa's parents were Shivalli Brahmins and followers of the Bhagwat tradition. The father's name was Madhyageha Bhatta and mother's was Vedavati. It seems that the house where they lived was the central place in the village, which gave 'Madhyageha' name to father. He was a great exponent of the Bhagwat system and had studied the Puranas and Shastras and the epics, which had earned for him the title 'Bhatta'.

Both Shaivism and Vaishnavism thrived at this time and had followers, who worshipped at the temples dedicated to the worship of Har or Shiva and Hari, the Vishnu. But they all believed in the Adwait system of philosophy as propounded by Shankara. But some dissent was discernable and there were followers who were thinking of falling out of this group. Madhyageha Bhatta was the leader of such a group. He was a devoted householder and observed all the austerities expected of a genuine religious person, like fasting or performing conventional pooja at the temple. His two sons died at an early age. He had one daughter left, but no son. He visited the Ananteshwar temple and prayed for a son.

The temple priest had a vision and he told Madhyageha Bhatt that God Vayu would incarnate as his son. Madhwa or Vasudev was born. He spent his early childhood under the care of his father and had his early education under his guidance. When he was eight years old, the Upnayan or thread ceremony was performed. Thereafter he studied under Thottam Thillaya, a learned Brahmin well versed in the knowledge of Upanishads and Darshan Shastras. Madhwa's education included study of poetry, Nyaya Shashtra, Vedas and Vedantas. Madhwa then decided to look for a Guru, who could initiate him, as he felt that he had a mission in life and was not destined to lead a house-holder's

life. In Udupi there lived Purushottam Teertha belonging to Bhandaraka Math, which flourishes even today. The desolate father was heart-broken and implored his son to return home, but in vain. Madhyageha returned home and told his wife about the failure of his mission. They both again came down to the place about 38 miles from Udupi where Madhwa was camping and implored him to return home as he was their only son. Madhwa yielded a little and promised not to become a Sanyasin till another son was born to them. This wish was soon fulfilled and Madhwa came down to see his younger brother. There was no choice left with the parents, but to give permission to Madhwa to become a Sanyasin.

Madhwa then became an ordained Sanyasin though he was just sixteen years old. His Guru blessed him and gave him a new name Poorna Prajna. Madhwa took over the duties of the new order in right earnest. He served his Guru well. When not engaged otherwise, he devoted himself to the study of 'Bhagwatam'; and in course of time learned the whole by heart. His Guru was convinced of the greatness of his disciple and nominated him as his successor. He was then called 'Anand Teertha'.

Madhwacharya or Anand Teertha now began to attack the philosophy of Shankara's system of Adwait of which even his Guru was a protagonist. The Guru however, said that it was all right to criticise the Adwait system, but there should be something else to replace. Madhwacharya then undertook a tour of the entire country to propagate his views. He was always on the move giving learned discourses to earnest and eager crowds. His Guru also accompanied him, even though he was old. The group passed through Mangalore, Vishnumangalam, Cochin and Trivandrum. At Trivandrum, Madhwacharya had a meeting with Vidya Shankara, head of the Sringeri Math. There were heated discussions and the two parted. From there Madhwacharya visited Rameshwaram and then to Pandya and Chola territories. After visiting Sringeri, Srimushnam and Chandragiri, Madhwacharya returned to Udupi with his entourage. On his return he wrote a commentary on 'Bhagvat Geeta' which is remarkable for its brevity and persiflidity of

thought. He then sought his Guru's permission to go to Badrikashram in the company of Satya Teertha, another disciple.

The group passed through Banaras, where they had a holy bath in the Ganges and then went to Badrinath, where they camped at a place called Anand Math. Madhwacharya spent some days and prayed to the Lord. According to a legend, Veda Vyasa appeared before him and invited him to visit his Ashram and hermitage up above. Madhwacharya left his group behind and left for the Ashram accompanied by Satya Teertha. It is said that Madhwacharya met Rishi Vyasa and learnt from him the true meaning of Brahma Sutras. During his return journey, Madhwacharya commenced writing his commentary on Brahma Sutras and completed it before reaching Udupi. His co-disciple Staya Teertha made a few copies of the work.

During his discourses, Madhwacharya denounced Adwaita system and said, "How can light be identified with darkness, truth with delusion, and knowledge with ignorance, the finite with the infinite, bliss with pain?" He preached Bhakti and complete surrender to the Lord as the ultimate goal. Amongst his important works are 'Brahma Sutras', 'Nyaya Sudha', 'Geeta Bhasya', 'Mahabharat Tatparya Nirnaya' and 'Visnu Tattva Nirnaya' amongst his thirty-seven works that he wrote. It is said that the philosophy propounded by Madhwacharya was originally handed over by Vayu to his son Hanuman, who gave it to Bheema and in the end was received by Anand-Teerth or Madhwacharya.

One day when Madhwacharya had gone to take bath in the nearby sea, he saw a ship which was in some difficulty and about to sink. Madhwacharya prayed to the Lord for its safety and his prayers were heard. When the ship reached the shore, the Captain of the ship presented to Anand Teerth a huge lump of Gopichandan earth. It was taken to the Math. When broken, it revealed two icons of Lord Krishna. It had come from Dwarka where it had been covered with earth and remained there for some centuries. A temple was built where they were installed. Madhwacharya ordained eight ascetics and placed them in charge of separate 'Maths'.

**Madhwacharya** undertook a second journey to Badrinath shrine when he was about sixty years old. On his return he learnt about the death of his parents. His younger brother came to him and requested him to be initiated. Madhwacharya accepted the request and made him the head of one of the Maths.

Madhwacharya lived upto the age of seventy-nine years and died in 1278 A.D. He was succeeded in the pontificate by Narhari Teerth who occupied the seat for nine years.

Madhwa's philosophy will be discussed in a separate chapter.

## SHRI VALLABHACHARYA

In Andhra Pradesh near the range of Vyomstambh hills and to the south of Krishna river, there lived a family, which was well known for piety and worship of Lord Vishnu. They were Yajurvedis and belonged to Bhardwaj Gotra. The chief of this family was Shri Govindacharya. His son was Vallabh Dixit, who had a son named Yagya Narayan Bhatt. He remained celibate for a number of years and eventually married Narmada, daughter of Sudharma of Devpur. The couple observed many austerities and prayed for a son. Gangadhar Somayaji was born to them and the progeny continued. They were all extremely devoted persons.

Balbhatt belonged to the fourth generation. He had two sons, named Lakshman Bhatt and Janardan Bhatt. Lakshman Bhatt was an extremely learned person and married Yallamagaru, daughter of another learned Pandit Sudharma. Lakshman Bhatt continued the series of Yagyas performed by his predecessors. On completing 100 such Yagyas, the couple decided to visit Kashi or the present Banaras and give feast to over one lakh Brahmins. The couple lived in Kakrawad and had two daughters and one son. These were left in charge of Janardan Bhatt and the couple left for Banaras accompanied by a big retinue consisting of disciples and some other relatives. On the way they met and came to know Seth Krishna Das, an official of the Raja of Champaranya, who was childless. Lakshman Bhatt on reaching Banaras took his dwelling in a house in Hanuman Ghat where persons known to him lived. He engaged himself in spiritual discourses with local Pandits and often gave feasts to them. During this period, which was about 1479 A.D., a panic spread in the town due to imminent attack by the ruling Mughal Emperor and people started fleeing to other places. Lakshman Bhatt also followed them. On the way, when the party was near Chaturbhujpur, Yallamagaru gave birth to a still-born child in her eighth month of pregnancy. The child wrapped up in a Sari was left under the shade of a tree and the couple returned to the nearby village.

News was brought that the people of Banaras had defeated the Mughal army and so the party decided to return to Kashi. On the way they noticed the tree where the still-born child had been abandoned. They were surprised to find a celestial fire burning round the place where the child was left, who was living and very much kicking. When the mother approached to pick up the child, the fire miraculously disappeared. This child was later known as Vallabhacharya, the founder of Shudh-Adwait and the Pushti-Marg. The day was Thursday, Dhanishta constellation, Vaishakh Krishna Paksh Ekadashi, Samvat 1535 corresponding to the year 1479 A.D. Seth Krishna Das also had been blessed with a son and considered this as an act of grace from Lakshman Bhatt. He gave shelter to Lakshman Bhatt whenever it became necessary.

At the age of seven, i.e. in 1542 Samvat or near about the year 1586 A.D., the boy underwent the sacred thread ceremony and began his studies of Vedas and other holy scriptures under a guru of Kashi. He showed a high calibre of learning and impressed everyone. Lakshman Bhatt died shortly in 1590 A.D. Vallabhacharya left for Gaya accompanied by his mother and other brothers to perform the Shraddha ceremony of his dead father. He then travelled on foot and first came to Chitrakoot of hallowed memory. Then he went to his native place Champaranya. He was joined there by other members of his family. From there the party travelled to Vindhya-giri, Siddhipad and finally reached Agra-har, where they were welcomed by his uncle Janardan Bhatt.

Vallabhacharya was joined by many followers including his cousin Shambu Bhatt. A Brahmin came to his uncle's house to pay condolences to Yallamagaru on the death of her husband. He informed the party that the Raja of Vidyanagar often held conferences of learned Pandits where debates were held on spiritual matters. The Raja had decided to accept as his own Guru whosoever was declared the most learned and wise. Vallabhacharya was advised to join these debates. He accepted the idea and left for Vidyanagar. At Vidyanagar, he won all the laurels after a debating session that lasted for twenty-eight days. Vallabhacharya propagated

his philosophy of Vishudh-Adwait Vada after the conference. He was unanimously accorded the title of 'Jagatguru Sri Vallabhacharya Maha Prabhu'. Raja Krishna Dev was also initiated into the Order. Vallabhacharya declined to accept a plate laden with gold sovereigns as a gift from the Raja and took out only one coin and distributed the rest to his disciples for being used in furthering the cause of his Order.

Vallabhacharya left on tour of the country and gathered followers wherever he went. He visited Vidyanagar again and met Raja Krishna Dev. From there he reached Gokul near Mathura. He composed there his famous work 'Siddhanta-Rahasya'. He declared his 'Pushti-Marga' i.e. the method and the way to obtain Lord's grace. He wrote 'Siddhanta Muktavali' and 'Pushti-Pravah Maryadah Bheda'. Along with his third book, 'Bal-bodh', the three books form the keystone of his philosophy and teachings. The Acharya gave great importance and value to service of the fellow-men and supported his teachings by various quotations from 'Shrimad Bhagwatam'. To obtain 'pushti' or the Lord's grace, it was necessary to realise the Brahma and serve the Lord. He has dwelt at length on the manner and culture of devotion or Bhakti in his three books 'Nav-ratnam', 'Bhakti-Vardhini' and 'Vivek Dhalyashriya'. He then wrote 'Seva-phal' or the result of service. In this manner the Acharya originated the 'Pushti-Marg' and his Shudh Adwait.

The Acharya was married to Maha Lakshmi, daughter of Dev Bhatti of Kashi. After six months, he again left for going round the country. The Acharya had undertaken three such wide ranging tours which included all the main places of interest in the four corners of the land, which included places in Gujarat, Maharashtra and also Badrinath. He spent a total of 18 years in his pilgrimage. At Gaughat near Vrindavan, he met the blind bard Surdas and initiated him into his Order. At Kashi he had also meetings with the Bengal saint Gaurang Shri Chaitanya Maha Prabhu and had talks with him on spiritual matters.

Shri Vallabhacharya is credited with many miracles. He reached Jagannath Puri and became aware of his approaching

end. From there he went to Gangasagar and completed the third part of 'Subodhini Comments'.

Towards the end of his life he became a monk and ascetic. He took Sanyas after obtaining permission of his mother and wife. He spent his last days in Kashi and then his soul merged with the infinite on Ashadh-Shukla Tritiya, at mid-day of samvat 1587 corresponding to the year 1531 at the age of fifty-two. His achievements considering the short span of his life are immense. He was truly a realised person.

Shudh-Adwait philosophy will be discussed in a separate chapter.

## BHAKTA SHRI PURANDAR DAS

Vardappa Naik and his wife Lakshmi Akka were a happy couple. He was dealer in jewellery and costly merchandise and had amassed lot of wealth. Only one thing was wanting to make their happiness complete. They had no son. So they visited holy places, including Tirupati and prayed to the Lord to bless them with a son. They spent twelve years like this and then returned to their native place in Purandargarh. A son was born to them in 1482 A.D., who was named Shriniwas. The boy grew amidst luxury and prosperity. When the father died, Shriniwas, also called Shivappa, took over the business and managed the affairs so well that the business flourished well. He visited Golconda, Vijaynagar and Gulbarga to trade in diamonds, pearls and other costly stones. He came to be recognised as an expert connoisseur in evaluating their genuineness. His wife, Saraswati, and he were a devoted couple. They were fond of fine arts like music and dance and were also god-fearing at the same time. But with these good qualities, the desire to become more and more wealthy, became a passion with them. They were never hospitable to visitors and did not believe in charity.

But Shivappa was not born to roll in luxury and wealth. An incident occurred which changed Shivappa completely and resultantly his perceptions also underwent complete change. A poor Brahmin approached Shivappa at his shop and narrated his pitiful story. He was penniless and wanted some donation as his daughter had to be married. Shivappa looked at him with disdain and in order to dismiss him asked him to come the next day. The next day, when the Brahmin came, he got the same reply. Shivappa did not know how to get rid of him and this solicitousness and the clever refusal went on for nearly six months, at the end of which Shivappa just threw a paisa coin at him and asked him to go away or else he would ask his servants to turn him out.

The Brahmin left the coin there, went to Shivappa's house and repeated the same story to Saraswati, Shivappa's

wife. Saraswati asked him to go to the master of the house and see him at the shop. The Brahmin then narrated the entire story and the treatment he got at her husband's hands. Saraswati was a pious woman and knew her husband's nature. If she gave him some money, she would invite her husband's wrath. Then what could be done? Suddenly she remembered that the nose-ring that she was wearing was a present from her father and she could give it without touching any money from her husband. She immediately took off the ring and gave it to the Brahmin, as she was sure that by selling it he could raise sufficient money with which to marry off his daughter.

The Bramin took the nose-ring to Shivappa's shop and handed over the ornament for being exchanged into money. Shivappa at once knew that the nose-ring belonged to his wife. When he heard the account from the Brahmin, he lost his control completely on realising that whereas he had got rid of the Brahmin by giving merely one paisa, the Brahmin by some fraudulent trick got the nose-ring worth thousands of rupees. He locked the ring in his safe and went home to question his wife. When Saraswati saw him shaking with anger, she stood before him dumb-founded and could not utter a word. "Where is the ring?" shouted Shivappa. "Do you think that because it was a gift from your father, you had a right to give it to anyone you liked?" "No, my lord. When I am yours, everything that belongs to me is automatically yours. The ring must be somewhere inside the house." "Go and bring the same at once. If you do not do so, I will give you such a thrashing that you will remember all your life." Poor Saraswati did not know what to do. How could the ring be in the house, when she had gifted it to the Brahmin and the husband had locked it inside the safe. Yet she went inside and devoutly prayed before the Lord to come to her rescue. "O Lord!", murmured she, "what shall I do. I listened to my inner voice which was in fact yours and gave the ring to the Brahmin. How can I produce it now?" In complete despair, she took a glass of water to drink when she beheld something at the bottom of the glass shining. It was the same ring! She thanked the Lord, came out and gave it to her husband. It

was the turn of Shivappa to get stunned, because he had locked the ring in the safe personally and the key was in his possession. He hurried back to the shop and on opening the safe found the ring missing from the packet where he had kept it. And so the miraculous change in him came with the realisation that it was Vitthal, the Lord, who had come to his wife's rescue. He rushed back home and embraced his wife seeking forgiveness.

Shivappa was no more the greedy, usurer or the miser holding money by the skin of his teeth. He collected the whole town and gifted all that he had to the poor and needy. Nothing was kept back. Money, gold, ornaments, costly items of household use, everything belonging to him was given in charity. The husband and wife then dressed like two mendicants and left on foot for Pandharpur. His eyes began to flow with tears of compassion and he began to perform 'Keertan' and discourses interspersed with music and song. He drew big crowds, which were moved with overwhelming emotions for the divine. The King of Vijaynagar was Shri Krishna Dev and his spiritual Guru was Swami Vyas Rai, who was also a high official at the court. Shivappa got his initiation as a hermit at his noble hands. He was thereafter called 'Purandar Vitthal' or simply Purandar Das.

Purandar Das's reputation spread far and wide. He was greatly venerated for his piety and holiness. He and his wife went and begged for food for sustenance and were happy at whatever they got. At some houses they were repulsed and then realised how in the past, people who had received similar treatment at his hands must have felt. But this type of behaviour only served to chasten him.

Because of his complete faith in the Lord and his preceptor, he found that he could compose poetry. His compositions were remarkable for devotion to the Lord, detachment of worldly desires and for their sublimation in spiritual matters. It is believed that Purandar Das composed some 47,500 verses, though only a few are available today. In Karnatak every house-holder can recite some of the verses transmitted to posterity by Purandar Das. He is called

Tukaram of Karnatak, because of the popularity of his verses, as were Tukaram's Abahangas. In his verses, he had made no secret of the change brought about in him by his wife's selflessness. He admitted that it was his wife who directed him towards the spiritual path, otherwise he would have been wallowing in mud of selfishness and material things. "I was ashamed to hold the palanquin carrying the Lord's idol. My wife drove away that sense of shame and humiliation, which I felt in the beginning. I used to wear a necklace studded with diamonds and other costly jewels. Now she has given me a rosary of Tulsi beads and I do so with greatest of happiness. She has taught me to beg food from door to door. I feel no humiliation in doing so. My wife has been my real preceptor and I owe her all this and much more."

In one of his verses, he says, "Look there comes my dear Vitthal! the Lord who rides on the back of the celestial bird Garud, the Lord who reclines on the coils of Shesh Nag, the Lord who taught Arjun on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Look the Lord with divine smiles has come to greet me". In another verse, he says, "Lord, Shriniwas, I am blessed to behold your form. So far I had been after lust and vainful desires, but repentence has chastened me now and I seek refuge at your divine feet." All his verses are soaked in divine devotion towards Vitthal. They make a direct appeal to the listerns and to those who recite them regularly. He preached equality for all without any distinction of caste, colour or creed. He was a social reformer and revolutionary in that respect. He preached in this manner for some forty years and has left an indelible mark on the contemporary society and also the posterity.

## AKKA MAHADEVI

In the cult of Vir Shaiva, three categories of devotees and realised persons have been categorised. A Bhakta is one who has just commenced his devotion towards Lord Shiva. That is the preparatory stage. The next stage is Mahesliwar, i.e. one who has vowed to devote all his life to the service of Shiva. The third and highest category is that of 'Sharan' i.e. one who has completely surrendered himself to God and his service. In the middle of twelfth century, the region known as Kannad was famous for its religious and social growth. Many saints like Vasaveshwar and his followers had given a new cult of Veer-Shaiva which was established. In that galaxy of great scholars and realised persons, there was one who had made a great mark. That was Akka Mahadevi. She had attained the stage of 'Sharan' in her devotion towards Lord Shiva. In the Kannad language, the prefix 'Akka' is used as an address of love and respect towards the elder sister. In the spiritual sense, Mahadevi, being truly an elderly person, was fully entitled to that prefix.

Due to her devotion to Lord Shiva, she left behind the luxurious life of the palace and became a seeker after truth by continuous wanderings. She had an inborn gift of a poet. Her compositions have acquired the value of everyday saying's in Kannad language, thereby enriching the language itself. The cult of Veer-Shaiva had given this invaluable gift to humanity in Kannad language by these sayings, which have now become universal by their pragmatism and humanistic approach. Among those who have gifted these valuable sayings, Mahadevi holds a unique position. She has written, 'Yogang Trividhi' which consists of short three-lined verses. They describe in a symbolical manner deep mystical truths which are frequently quoted.

Mahadevi was born in a family which was follower of Shiva and observed the rituals of Shiva-cult. The ruling prince was Kaushik. Mahadevi was an extremely beautiful girl. As she gained womanhood, her beauty increased by

leaps and bounds. Once while returning from his sporting bouts, Kaushik saw Mahadevi, who was sitting near her house. Kaushik was instantaneously attracted towards her. He stopped the elephant he was riding in front of the house. The procession following the Raja also stopped and a crowd of onlookers collected. Mahadevi at first joined the fun, but on finding that she herself was the centre of attraction entered her house and hid there. The Raja's ministers and other high officials persuaded the king to return to the palace, but he had developed such an infatuation for the girl that nothing would keep him quiet. The courtiers had no choice, but to approach Mahadevi's parents and give Mahadevi in marriage to the king. Her parents were simple folks. They were afraid that refusal would result in their persecution at the hands of the king. They advised their daughter to accept the proposal and live a life of luxury. But Kaushik was not a Shaiva or a follower of that cult. This did not suit Mahadevi and she flatly turned down the proposal for marriage. She was an ardent follower of Mallikarjun. Her mental state is best described by her following verses:

"O Mother, my love is such that neither death, nor any wasting disease can effect it. It is given to the form who is unaffected by all such things. It has no middle, no end nor any beginning. He is so beatiful. He who has no formal birth, nor has any fear touched him, on such an entity my love is given."

(Free hand translation)

Further she adds:

"He is beyond compare with regard to his family, country, but in beauty he is incomparable. He alone is my lord and husband; Chenna Mallikarjun, he is so handsome..."

Under these circumstances, it was not possible to accept the king as her husband. Harihar has written her life-sketch. According to him the king's messengers left with this denial. They informed the king that Mahadevi had no allurement for earthly pleasures. The king's infatuation on hearing this knew no bounds and he ordered that she be

brought before him by force if necessary. She should be given whatever she wanted, but she must be produced before him. The King's messengers conveyed the royal orders and advised her parents to accept the offer, so as to live a life of comfort and luxury, rather than lose their lives and property. The parents cried before their daughter. They told her to avoid this confrontation and accept the marriage offer. Mahadevi thought that besides herself the matter concerned others also and thought of the old sayings that devotees of Shiva (such as her parents were) should be protected by all means, even if it means sacrificing one's life for their sake. She advised her parents to accept the offer and told the messengers that she would lay down three conditions for the marriage: 'I will continue my Shiva-bhakti as before. I will spend my time in serving my Guru and preceptor without let or hindrance. I will be house-holder according to my own wishes. There will be no let-up in these conditions. If the king violates them, I will permit lapses just three times.' Mahadevi's conditions were gladly accepted. Not only verbal assurances were given, but a written document was prepared accepting these conditions.

The day of marriage arrived. Mahadevi's parents were given costly presents, whereas the bride was decked in royal clothes and jewellery. But Mahadevi was extremely sad and forlorn. She felt like an animal being led to the sacrificial alter. She held fast to her bosom the Shiva-ling and muttered the Bhakti-songs of Mallikarjuna. After her marriage she spent the day in worshipping the Lord and singing hymns of His praise. Shiva-bhaktas were treated to a royal repast and were given presents. She would herself compose verses describing her devotion. As soon as the sun set, she had to heed her husband's summon to go to the bed-chamber. With a heavy heart she bade good-bye to the Shiva devotees, who had collected and then she prayed to Shiva to come to her rescue and release her from those bondages. She removed all her ornaments and costly dresses and entered the bed-chamber in simple dress. But even this ascetic's dress appealed to Kaushik. On such occasions, Mahadevi had composed following verses:

"Lord, listen to my prayers; if you are not inclined to hear me, I do not protest.

Except for singing hymns of your praise,

I have no other satisfaction.

Accept my prayers, but even otherwise I have no complaints."

Mahadevi's attraction towards Shiva was spiritual, whereas Kaushik was attracted to her beautiful body only. Time passed slowly in such diverse conditions till one day some Sanyasis came to the palace and expressed a desire to meet her. Mahadevi was resting at that time. Kaushik told the servants to turn them away and complained that not even a day passed without such ascetics visiting his wife. His shouts and observations woke Mahadevi. She grieved on hearing such expressions about Shiva-devotees. She cried and told her husband that this was the first lapse he had committed. Another lapse soon occurred. Mahadevi was sitting in her shrine room fully absorbed in her meditative worship. There was an ethereal beauty about her. Kaushik came there and was immediately drawn towards her and he indulged into amorous activities towards his wife. Mahadevi immediately withdrew from his embrace and in harsh words told him that a second lapse had occurred. And then the third occasion. Once she was with her husband wearing ordinary clothes, when she was informed of her Guru's arrival. In that very state she rushed to have his 'darshan'. Kaushik felt extremely humiliated and tauntingly remarked, "Eh, why put on these clothes even. For an ascetic like you, even if you go naked, what is the difference?" Here was the third lapse. Kaushik had done so much to please her and detain her in the palace. But the three conditions laid down before marriage had been broken and Mahadevi was now free to leave the palace.

She came out of the palace with just the Shiva-idol which she always carried with her. Torture of the body and afflictions of soul came to an end and she was now a free bird. She headed towards Chenn Mallikarjun. After many trials and tribulations she reached the place. She had

darshan of the Lord and spent her time in worship and singing of hymns. There was no impediment to her activities. She continued in this manner. Her parents came to visit her. They were grieved to find her in that afflicted condition bereft of all royal comforts and luxuries.

Her troubles had not ended yet. Kaushik came to her. He tried new tricks this time. He was dressed like a Shiva devotee with white horizontal marks on his forehead and a rosary of rudraksha round his neck. He fell at her feet and implored her to return. But Mahadevi had gone beyond all physical pleasures and could no more be trapped by their allurements. She had adequately expressed her ideas in this connection in her compositions. Kaushik tried new tricks. He approached all the Shiva devotees and informed them that for his wife's sake he had ceased to be an amorous lover and had now become a Shiva devotee. He requested them to persuade his wife to return to him. They were convinced of his arguments and sent some people to persuade Mahadevi. But Mahadevi was absorbed in deep meditation and trance when they came. Her expression was so austere and glowing with spiritual radiance that none dared to disturb her. Kaushik was advised to return, as Mahadevi could never be persuaded to return to family life.

Mahadevi spent the later part of her life in extreme distress. She expressed her agony in the following verses:

"If you build a house in the forest or on a mountain, why then fear about ferocious animals?

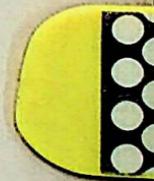
If a house is constructed by the side of sea. Why then be afraid of the rolling waves?

If the house is built in a market place,

Why then mind the noise and commotion? Chennamahaprabhu is the only true lordborn in this world, why be disturbed by abuses or feel elated by praises!

One must always maintain poise and the peace of mind. should not be affected."

There are many verses bringing out this truth. She had burning love for her Lord and Master and pined for him. She had described her agonies in verses that have become a rich legacy of Kannad literature. A sure place is assured for her for ever in the hearts of all Kannad people. She lives even today.



## NIMBARK

Vaishnavism with its strong feeling of Bhakti, marked by both love and fear of the unknown spread over the entire South from the middle of the eleventh century to the middle of thirteenth century. While saints of this movement adopted Sanskrit or one of the southern languages; to propagate their views, there were others who used other languages as well, specially in the northern part of the country. Nimbark wrote in Sanskrit only, even though his field of activity was in the North at Vrindavan, near Mathura.

Nimbark was a Tailang Brahman. There are different interpretations of how he came to be called by this name. Some say that he was born in a village called 'Nimba', which perhaps is the same as Nimbapura in Bellary district. According to 'Siddhanta Kāumudi', his real name was Nityanand. 'Nimb' is a tree popularly called 'Neem' and as the sun's rays fell on this tree in the evening when he was born, he was called 'Nimbark' i.e. 'Nimb' 'ark' meaning Sun. His followers, therefore, considered him as an incarnation of the discus (Sudarshan chakra) of Lord Vishnu. His year of birth is not correctly known, but it is surmised that he died sometime in 1162 A.D., though this year is also not firm. His father's name was Maheshwar Bhatt.

Nimbark is supposed to have lived after Ramanujacharya (1071 A.D. to 1137 A.D.). His famous works are (i) 'Vedant-Parijaat-Saurabh', (ii) 'Dash-shloki', (iii) 'Shrikrishnastavaraj' and some other lesser known works. 'Vedant-Parijaat-Saurabh' is a short commentary on the Brahma Sutras of Uttar Mimansa. 'Dash-shloki' with a commentary by Hariyas Acharya contains the quintessence of his philosophy. Sriniwas, the immediate successor of Nimbark, Hariyas Deva and Devacharya, wrote various commentaries on these ten stanzas (Dash-shloki). Nimbark's Vedantic theory is monistic and appears to be greatly influenced by Ramanujacharya. His philosophy also shows a pluralistic approach. To understand his philosophy, given below is

translation of these ten stanzas (pp. 65 of 'Vaishnavism and Saivism' by Sir R.G. Bhandarkar):

I. Jiva or the individual soul is knowledge, dependent on Hari and is in a condition to be associated with, or dissociated from, a body; is an atom; different in different bodies; and is a knower and numberless.

It is called here knowledge to show that it is able to know without the organs of sense, and it is not to be understood here that the soul is a mere phenomenon of knowledge, and not a substance which is the doctrine of Shankaracharya.

II. The individual soul has his form distorted by its contact with Maya, or Prakriti, or the constituent principle with the three qualities which has no beginning. Its true nature becomes known by the grace of God.

Individual souls are of two sorts: (i) those delivered or in a supremely blissful condition; (ii) those tied down to the circle of existences. The first are of two kinds: (a) those who are eternally in a supremely blissful condition, such as (i) Garuda, Vishwakarma and the crown, the ear-ornaments, and the flute considered as living beings; and (ii) those who are freed from the trammels of life. Of these last, some attain to the likeness of God and others are content with the perception of the nature of their own souls. Corresponding to these last are two kinds of Mumukshu, those who seek deliverance of either kind.

III. The inanimate objects are of three kinds: (i) not derived from Prakriti; (ii) derived from Prakriti, and (iii) time. In the things derived from Prakriti we have the ordinary material objects having the three colours, viz. red, white and dark.

The first class consists of those which are spoken of figuratively by the use of names of objects belonging to the second class such as the sun like effulgence of the Supreme Soul. It is an effulgence not arising from the Prakriti. Similarly, the body, hands, feet and ornaments of God as well as all the surroundings such as garden, palace, etc.

belong to the first class and are of inanimate nature, though they are made of matter i.e. not derived from Prakriti.

**IV.** I meditate on the highest Brahman viz. Krishna, who has eyes like the lotus, who naturally is free from all faults, is the store of all beneficent attributes, who has Vyuhas for his parts and who is adored by all.

The Vyuhas here mentioned are those usually referred to in Pancharatras and also in the philosophy of Ramanuja system.

**V.** I reflect on the daughter of Vrishbhanu (Radhika), who shines with a corresponding beauty on the left side (of Krishna), is attended on by thousands of female friends and who confers all desired objects.

**VI.** The Parabrahma should always be worshipped uninterruptedly by men in order to be free from darkness in the shape of ignorance, in which they are enveloped. So was Narada, who directly perceived the whole truth, taught by Sanandan and others.

**VII.** All things having Brahman for their souls in accordance with the Shruties and Smritis, the knowledge that Brahman is all, is true. This is the doctrine of those who know the Vedas and at the same time the three forms are true as determined from the secret precepts and the Sutras.

Here is laid down the unity of all things in so far as Brahman is the inner controlling soul of all and is concomitant with them and their actions are dependent on it, and also pluralism since they are three distinct substances, which are called forms of Brahman, viz. the inanimate world, the individual soul and the Supreme Soul.

**VIII.** There appears no way to salvation except the lotus like feet of Srikrishna, which are adored by Brahma, Siva and others - Krishna, who at the desire of a devotee, assumes a form easy of meditation and whose power is unthinkable and whose essence cannot be comprehended.

**IX.** His grace extends itself to those who have a feeling of helplessness and other qualifications, and that grace is

generated from Bhakti, or devotion, consisting of special love for him, who has no superior lord. This Bhakti is of two kinds: the highest is one and the other is one that which leads to or is instrumental to it.

By the feeling of helplessness and other qualifications are meant the six modes of Prapatti given in connection with Ramanuja's system. The Bhakti which is instrumental to that which is the highest is of the nature of the six or nine modes mentioned in previous sections.

**X.** These five things should be known by the devotees: (i) the nature of being to be worshipped; (ii) the nature of the worshipper; (iii) the fruit of God's grace; (iv) the feeling of enjoyment consequent on Bhakti or love and (v) obstructions to the attainment of God. -

The above ten stanzas contain the quintessence of Nimbark's system. They seem to have Ramanuja's philosophy as their base.

Followers of Nimbark are spread over the whole of northern India. They are also found in large numbers in parts of Bengal. Nimbark considered Krishna and His playmate Radha as Supreme. His system is also known as Sanaksampradaya or the tradition originating with Sanak. Though a southerner, Nimbark lived in Vrindavan near Mathura. Followers of this sect wear two perpendicular lines of Gopichandan paste with a black spot in the middle of the forehead and necklace and rosary of Tulsi plant wood. They are divided into two classes, the ascetics and the householders. This distinction appears to have begun at the time of Hariyasdeo.

It is remarkable that many stories have been current about the Yogis of this cult. One such story appeared in a famous Hindi magazine in the February 1987 issue under the caption, "Alaukik Sant Kathia Baba etc." It narrates how three Nimbark saints dressed in simple 'Kaupins' (simple piece of strips of cloth covering the privities) made of wooden barks. These three saints appeared before a married woman and blessed her for a son and then disappeared. They all

looked like Sanyasins or ascetics and seemed to possess enormous occult powers. Baba Dhananjaya Das, who was originally named Dharendra Chakravarti, was born in Bankura district of West Bengal and after renovating the Ashram in Vrindavan, took Samadhi in 1984.

Nimbark has as such, left a band of devoted followers who are keeping aloft the banner of his philosophy.

## TIRUNAVUKKARASU OR APPAR

Tirunavukkarasu was popularly called Appar, after he had been so addressed by Sambabndar on their first meeting in Sirkazhi. Appar was born in 600 A.D. in a village Tiruvamur in South Arcot district in a Saiva family. His father Pugazhanar and mother Madiniar were Siva-devotees and so was his elder sister Tilakavatiyar. She was engaged to be married to Kalippagai Nayannar, a commander in the army, but before the marriage could take place, he was killed in battle. Soon afterwards, the parents died and Appar truly became an orphan. The sister was so grief-stricken that she wanted to end her life, but Appar begged her to live for his sake, which she agreed. The younger brother became the centre of all her affections. They led a hard life and one adversity after another overtook them. Appar passed through many tests in life. He then turned to the study of religion.

He tried social service and other spiritual pursuits, but remained disconsolate. Those were the days when Jainism was prevalent and there were many adherents of this faith. Saivism was given a back-seat. Appar felt drawn to this creed due to its preaching of universal love and truth and non-violence. He joined the zealous band and began to propagate their philosophy. He joined a monastery at Tiruppaupulyar.

Appar's sister became very unhappy at this change in her brother and grieved immensely. She had lived for him only and thus isolated, she remained confined to a Shiva temple praying to the Lord to restore her brother. Her prayers were answered and it so happened that Appar became seriously ill. No amount of medication by Jain priests or medical men succeeded in restoring his health. Appar suffered great pain and anguish. Thinking that his end had come he sent words for his sister to come and meet him. They met outside the monastery. He was taken home by the sister. In a Shiva temple she prayed for his health and sacred ash was applied to his body. A miracle of miracles,

Appar felt restored to his normal health. His devotion to Lord Shiva took hold of him.

This had an adverse effect on the Jain priests, who felt that an important convert to Jainism had forsaken them. They complained to the ruling king at Kanchi and suggested strong punishment to the 'delinquent'. He visited the court of the ruler and the latter decided to award him severe and exemplary punishment for his delinquency. He was imprisoned and put to great torture. Many steps were taken to put him to death, but they all failed to destroy his life or faith. As a last resort, he was taken and thrown into the sea, but he miraculously escaped and appeared at Cuddalore port.

His trials and tribulations were now over. He met his sister and dedicated himself anew to the worship of Lord Shiva. He sang Bhajans, which became very popular. The Pallava ruler, who had persecuted him, became aware of his wicked actions. He came and sought the saint's forgiveness. He became a convert to Saivism and the saint blessed King Mahendra Verma.

Appar met Sambandar at Chila. The two were instantaneously drawn to each other. They visited many holy places together singing songs about the glory of the Lord. Appar has composed some 3000 songs, which constitute the fourth, fifth and sixth parts of 'Tirumurai', an important Saivite canonical literature.

Appar is a name very much venerated in the South and is considered a great saint.

## TIRUGNANA SAMBANDAR

Sambandar was born at Sirkazhi (Tamil Nadu) in a Brahmin family in the early seventh century. His father Sri Padshridaya and mother Bhagwati were a religious couple. When the child was three, his father took him to the temple tank, left him on the steps of the tank and himself went to take a dip. The child began to cry. According to a legend, Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati were passing that way. The Goddess was drawn to the child by his cries. It is said that she fed the child with her own milk. When his father came out, he noticed milk on the lips of the child and asked his son about this. The child replied and pointed to the fading figures of the Lord and Parvati and informed him that the Goddess had fed him.

Sambandar has described this incident in the first song that he composed later on. The father could not see the divine figures, but he was certain of divine patronage to his son. He took the child to the temple, where the child sang gloriously in praise of the Lord. As the news had spread soon afterwards, a crowd gathered. The father took the child on his shoulders from one temple to another and the young child sang hymns in praise of the Lord with great composure and competence. At Tirukkolakka, the child got a pair of gold cymbals which he took as gift of God. He used them with great mastery wherever he sang his songs. A minstrel named Tiruneelakanta Yazhpanar accompanied the boy during his wanderings and played on his flute whenever Sambandar sang.

Sambandar visited Chidambaram and offered prayers at the temple. He was presented with a palanquin duly decorated with pearls and other ornaments. They said that they had been commanded to do so in a dream. After this incident, he was considered a saint and homage was paid to him as a great spiritual leader. He visited other famous places of pilgrimage. At the age of eight thread ceremony was performed. A great and renowned saint, Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar

came to Sirkazhi to meet the boy, but the latter himself came forward to offer his respects to the elder saint and addressed him reverentially. They became fond of each other instantaneously and travelled together. During his travels, Sambandar met other holy people.

Another important event was his visit to Madurai, the capital of Pandya kingdom. With this visit, his life's mission of re-establishing worship of Lord Shiva was completed. Jains had a powerful sway at this time and had converted the ruler to their faith, though the Queen and the Prime Minister remained devoted to Saivism. Having heard about Sambandar, the Queen and the Prime Minister sent word to him with a request to visit Madurai. Sambandar was camping at Vedaranyam along with Tirunavukkarusu, who was now reverentially addressed as 'Appar', Sambandar accepted the invitation even though Appar was apprehensive about his safety and suspected some harm to him at the hands of the Jains. At Madurai he was welcomed by the Queen and the Prime Minister. He along with his entourage were lodged in a monastery. It so happened that the king at this time was suffering from a serious malady and had not responded to the treatment of Jain monks or their magic. At the Queen's suggestion, Sambandar was requested to see the King and give his blessings. Sambandar first visited the temple and prayed to the Lord. When he met the king, sacred ash was applied to his body which brought about complete cure.

Jain monks became furious at this incident and challenged Sambandar to many bouts of discussions on spiritual matters, but Sambandar came out victorious on every occasion. The king was converted to Saivism and became a follower of Sambandar. The saint returned to Sirkazhi and resumed his travels soon afterwards. He visited Tirubannamalai, Kalahasti, Tiruvalangadu and some other places and eventually reached Mylapore. Sivanesar, a local merchant, having heard about Sambandar, desired to offer his daughter, Poompavai in marriage to Sambandar. The girl however, died soon due to snake bite. Her bones were however, preserved in a vessel. On arrival, Sambandar was given a grand reception and was told the story of Poompavai.

Sambandar asked the father to bring to him the pot containing her last remains. Sambandar sang hymns in praise of the Lord and it is said that the girl came back to life. The father repeated his desire for the girl, but Sambandar declined saying that since he had been instrumental in bringing her back to life, she was like a daughter to him. Poompavai spent the remaining years of her life as virgin and devoted her life to the service of the Lord.

On his return to Sirkazhi, his father requested him to get married, as not doing so would be against Vedic injunctions. Sambandar agreed and was married to the daughter of Namiandar Nambi of Tirunallur. After the function, the party went to the local Siva temple to offer prayers. Sambandar addressed the Lord, "O Lord, my work is done. The time has come to return to your feet." It is said that a celestial light appeared and the newly weds, walked into it and disappeared from sight.

The Tirumurai or canonical works of Saivism in twelve parts have been handed to us by Nambiandar Nambi. Hymns composed by Sambandar of 383 decades are contained in the first three parts by Nambi.

Sambandar has sung the glory of the Lord in a filial affection. His songs are cherished even today and the saint is held in the highest esteem. There have been four Saiva Acharyas belonging to the seventh century in South India. Sundermurtinayanar has shown the path of friendship, Appar the path of service, Manikkavachakar the filial approach to God and Sambandar showed the path of knowledge. Appar and Manikkavachakar remained unmarried. Sundermurtinayanar was prevented from marrying by a divine intervention. Sambandar and his wife disappeared soon after marriage having merged in the celestial flame.

## SRI KANAK DASA

Birnayaka or Birappa of Bada had no children. His wife Bachamma and he pined for the birth of a son and performed all kinds of austerities. They visited Tirupati and prayed to the Lord Venkatesha to bless them with a son. Birappa was in his fifties. The Lord blessed him and a son was born, whom they named Thimmappa. Those were the good days of the Vijayanagar Empire and Thimmappa enjoyed luxurious life of a chieftain. As a young man he participated in many battles. He was acclaimed a hero due to victories gained by him. On the death of his father he became the chieftain of the village. Once while ploughing fields he came across a buried treasure consisting of pots of gold. On this account he came to be known as Kanak—meaning gold.

Kanak Dasa belonged to a low caste and suffered all the indignities that are the lot of the low-borne in India. He lived between the years 1508 and 1606 A.D. He is now considered as one of the foremost propounders of the 'Bhakti' movement in Karnatak. Bada and Kanigele, in Dharwar district of Karnatak state are associated with his name. Kanak Dasa was married to a girl who was also a pious woman. He was extremely happy as a house-holder and performed many charities. With the buried gold that he had acquired, he helped the needy and poor, built temples and spent money on construction of tanks and wells.

Strangely enough, he sometimes heard a voice within him, as if some one was calling out to him, "Kanak, will you not become my Das (devotee)?" But he did not heed it and continued in his old ways. He pined for a son, but his wife died without fulfilling his desire. Kanak became very desolate. The village, whose chieftain Kanak was, became the scene of a battlefield due to attack by neighbouring chieftain. Many lay dead or mauled on the battlefield. Kanak bemoaned lying seriously wounded himself. He prayed to Lord for help. Adikesava, Kanak's tutelary God, again gave him the same call that Kanak had heard many years ago, "Kanak, will you

become my devotee?" And Kanak replied, "Yes, Lord, but you must first make me whole and relieve my pain." He seemed to see an old man standing by his side and comforting him with his hands. The Pain vanished and Kanaka seemed to have a new lease of life.

After this incident, Kanak Dasa commenced a new life. He began to go from village to village. During his wanderings, he met Vyas Raya, the great saint of Madhva Sampradaya. Kanak instinctively felt that he had found the Master he had been looking for. He fell at his feet and begged to be accepted as a disciple. Vyas Raya could see the divinity in him, accepted him as his disciple and initiated him. The Master became very fond of his disciple causing much jealousy amongst his other followers. Once he gave a banana each to all and asked them to eat it, but without anyone noticing them doing it. All ate the fruit except Kanak Dasa, who remained sitting with the fruit in his hand. On being asked, why he had not followed the instructions of his Master, he replied, "How could I eat it unseen by any, since the Lord is always there seeing everything being omniscient?" The reply pleased the Master very much and the other devotees realised his spiritual greatness and left him alone.

Kanak Dasa became very popular after receiving his Master's blessings. His fame spread far and wide. His teachings made a great impression on all who heard him. A legend has grown about the temple in Udupi, where the Lord's statue stands facing the wall and with the back towards the front door. It is said that Kanak Dasa was refused permission to enter the temple and so he went behind the wall and cried and prayed to the Lord. The idol turned about and faced the direction where Kanak Dasa was standing. It remains in that position even today.

Poems and songs of Kanak Dasa are addressed to Keshava, who was called Adikeshava. Kanak Dasa sang the glory of the Lord and preached that the Unknown was omnipresent and omniscient. The finite form represents the Unknown Omnipresent. One has to surrender to the Lord completely. When the devotee surrenders to Him, divine

help comes automatically and the devotee is de-personalised automatically. Having tasted the devotion once, his mind is turned away from worldly matters and then he is able to cross the river of life successfully.

Kanak Dasa is a cherished name in Karnatak.

## SANT RANGNAYAKI ANDAAL

In the South, about fifty miles south-west of Madura there was a village called 'Striveliputur'. The village had been founded by two brave persons Velli and Kantan after clearing woodland. In this village lived the famous Alwar saint Vishnu Chitt. He was also known by another name 'Periya Alwar'. He was born in a prosperous and rich Brahmin family. The family was dedicated to the worship of Lord Krishna. Visnhu Chitt was extremely devoted to Krishna. Adjoining the house, a small garden had been laid out, where there were many Tulsi plants. Vishnu Chitt had made a habit of making a garland of Tulsi leaves and then offering the same to Lord Krishna, whose temple he visited daily without fail. He was deeply absorbed in the worship of his God and remained occupied in singing his praise. Shri Vallabh was the ruling prince of the state during those days. Vishnu Chitt was inspired to popularise the worship of Lord Visnhu under the patronage of the prince. This happened miraculously and Visnhu Chitt became a constant visitor to the king's court, where he was held in great esteem.

Vishnu Chitt had a very regular schedule at home. He got up early and after morning oblations, he got busy in cleaning the land where Tulsi plants grew while chanting at the same time hymns about the Lord's glory. He prepared suitable beds for planting new Tulsi plants. Once while he was busy doing this, to his utter surprise, he saw that a newly born girl-child was lying there. Whose baby was that? he wondered! But he failed to find the mother and therefore, presumed that the child was a gift from God and so decided to adopt her as his own, as he had no children. He placed her at the Lord's feet and said, "Lord, this is your property and I am offering it to your care. Protect her from all evils." He thought that she should be named 'Kodai', as suggested by the Lord Himself. 'Kodai' means a bunch of delicate and fragrant flowers. And so the child really was. He also called her by a pet name 'Goda'. This child became famous as 'Andaal' meaning Goda.

Vishnu Chitt had a peculiar dream once. During the Lord's avatar as a Wild Boar, when the Earth was rescued from the waters, earth enquired from the Lord, "Whose puja should I always perform, so as to please Thee?" The Lord said, "I like recitation of the Holy Names, flowers, leaves and water." It was revealed that with these thoughts, mother earth took human form as Andaal and grew as a child under Vishnu Chitt's care. Her hair was black like a raven's, eyes large and luminous, face attractive and deportment pleasant. At her parent's house she was also drawn to the worship of Lord Krishna. Once her father left on a visit to the temple, while she got busy in cleaning the garden and gave special attention and care to the Tulsi plants and the adjoining area.

When Andaal became of marriageable age, the matter was talked about. But Andaal gave an instantaneous reply, "My husband is Ranganath. I will marry none else. He alone is my husband." She would collect flowers from the garden, make a garland and then wear it. She would dance with joy and then exclaim, "Will Krishna like me now? Will I please him?" This wreath of flowers was taken every day and then offered to Lord Krishna in the temple. But Vishnu Chitt was not aware that it had been used by his daughter. When he came to know about this, he scolded her. Next day, Andaal gave the garland without wearing it. At night Vishnu Chitt had a dream, when he was told by the Lord that he liked the garland which Andaal was in the habit of wearing. Vishnu Chitt had the shock of his life.

Andaal was busy the whole day singing songs about the glory of Krishna. From her father she heard about the temple of Ranganath situated on the banks of river Kaveri. From that moment she was eager to visit the temple. In her waking moments she would address Krishna, as if he was her beloved and wondered why he came to her at night in dreams only, but never appeared before her in person. She became so intoxicated with love for Krishna that nothing else attracted her. One day her father Vishnu Chitt had a dream when the Lord told him to bring Andaal to Shrirangapattam, as He would marry her. When this news was communicated to Andaal, she was mad with joy. The father also rejoiced and

so did the other members of the community. They went to Srirangapattam. Andaal was dressed like a bride. When the party went to the temple and Andaal prostrated before the Lord, a miracle occurred. The bride just vanished from sight. She had merged with her Lord whom she considered as her husband. The spectators were aghast at this miracle. The day of her 'marriage' is still celebrated as holy day in the temple. Andaal was truly a saint of the highest order. This happened in the eighth century, but even today, the story is as fresh as if it had occurred only yesterday. She wrote certain verses called 'Tiruthave' or 'Shivrata' or 'Sacchiyar Tirmoli' and these are recited with great devotion.

Andaal reminds us of Meera Bai of Rajasthan, who led a similar life in the fifteenth century. Rather strange.

## SRI POTANA

Potana was born in Bammerra village (near Warangal district, in Andhra Pradesh) around 1372 A.D. Exact date of his birth is not known. He lived upto the middle of fifteenth century. He is well-known for having rendered '*Shrimad Bhagwat*' in Telugu. Maharshi Vyās had written the original *Bhagwat* in Sanskrit. It is considered a jewel amongst the Puranas, because of the richness of its contents and supreme beauty. *Bhagwat* describes the various sporting Leelas of Lord Visnu in His different incarnations. Vyās had undertaken to write this on an advice from the Sage Narad, when Vyās complained that even after writing '*Mahabharat*' and '*Vedant*', he was still feeling restless. The story of Lord Krishna is specially beautifully narrated. After writing *Bhagwat*, Vyās is said to have gained peace and extreme satisfaction.

Potana's rendering of *Bhagwat* is so superb that it remains unexcelled even today, as no one else has attempted to render it in Telugu after Potana. As a young man he wrote '*Bhogini-dandkam*' and dedicated it to Sarvajna Sangha Bhupala of Rachakonda State. Thereafter Potana decided not to write poetry any more to earn a living and surrendered himself to God for his sustenance. He became determined to find out the Eternal Truth or Reality. While he was feeling so restless, Lord Ram and His consort Seeta, appeared before him and asked him to write '*Shrimad Bhagwat*' in Telugu, as that would give immense happiness to his countrymen in Andhra. The vision then vanished, but Potana remembered every word of what was said and was determined to carry out the behests of the Lord.

He devoted his time completely to carry out the commands of the lord and thus a superb work emerged as a result of his effort and devotion. In his work he brought out rare beauty and magnificence of the original work. In this classic work many episodes like '*Prahlad Charitram*', '*Gajendra Moksham*', '*Rukmini Kalyanam*' and '*Shri Krishna Leelas*' have been brought out.

Potana had an ardent relative Kavi Sarvabhauma Srinath, who enjoyed royal patronage and lived a life of luxury. Srinath possessed some occult powers as a result of his various spiritual exercises. He wanted to make a show of these to Potana in order to induce him to approach the royal court and in turn obtain patronage, so that he could also become rich and prosperous. He set out to Potana's village with a large retinue. Potana was lost in meditation while his son Mallana was busy in ploughing land. Srikanth wanted to make a show of his yogic powers. This incident is connected with the movement of his palanquin which kept on moving even when the bearers were asked to step aside, thus demonstrating that Srikanth could cause the palanquin to move even when the bearers in the front were not holding the carriage. Mallana under instructions from his father untied the bullock on one side, but the plough kept moving on. Srikanth repeated the performance by removing the palanquin-bearers from the rear also and the carriage kept on moving without any bearers. Then Mallana removed the other bullock also and the plough continued to plough the field without anyone being there to pull it. Srikanth felt humbled at this sight, but was still determined to make a show of his yogic powers. He had brought a big retinue of followers along with him. Potana therefore, asked him to do honour to him by taking food. Srikanth knew that Potana was extremely poor and did not possess the means to feed so many persons. As such he was sure that Potana would be put to humiliations for his inability to offer food. While the party went to the river to take bath, Potana prayed to Goddess Saraswati to come to his help. The Mother appeared and assured Potana that everything would be arranged and not to worry. When the party arrived they were seated and from behind the curtain placed to the rear of the shrine, plates and vessels full of most delicious food started appearing. Srikanth had never tasted such delicacies. After the meals, Srikanth tried to persuade Potana to come to the royal court and seek favours. Potana was adamant that he would not sell himself to anyone for money. Bhagwat, which he had translated, would only be dedicated to the Lord and to no man, even if he was the ruler of the land.

Potana was a staunch devotee of Mother Saraswati. He dedicated his work to the divine feet of Lord Rama. At an early age he had written 'Veerbhadravijayam'. In his youth, he wrote 'Bhogini Dandakam'. Thereafter he wrote or translated 'Srimad Bhagwat' which is really jewel of the Telugu language. Some excerpts from 'Prahladopakhyanam' are given below to show rare beauty of his compositions:

"The hands that worship the lotus-eyed Lord are alone the merited hands.

The eyes that feast on the beauty of the Lord are alone the merited eyes.

The mind that yearns for the destroyer of the demon Madhu, is alone the merited mind.

The buddhi that is fixed on Purushottam—the supreme person—is alone the merited buddhi."

One will find similar devotional strains in his other work 'Kaladambodhi'. God is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. Surrender to God completely is the goal of man.

Potana has left behind a rich legacy in the shape of 'Bhagwat' in Telugu.

## SHRI THYAGRAJA

Like poet-saints of India, there have been many musician-saints. Shri Thyagraja ranks amongst the highest. Saints like him sought union with God by their devotional songs, that touched the very heart of their listeners, purifying and uplifting them along with directing their lives God-ward. Music is but channelling vibrations in a devotional strain. This is possible only if the musician is himself a highly evolved person and has sought communion with God by chanting God's name through songs set in devotional pattern. Goswami Tulsi Das and Surdas are examples of this kind of devotion. In the South Thyagraja expressed his devotion to God through music, which is called Karnatak music. He was a staunch devotee of Lord Rama and through his music he stirred up hearts of his listeners and turned them God-ward. His 'Krittis' bring tears and churn the human heart even today and they are the treasure-house of wisdom and spiritual matters even today.

On the banks of Kaveri is situated a small town known as Tiruvaliyaru or the 'Panichanadi Kshetra' meaning the land of five rivers, like the name of Punjab, which was named as such due to the five rivers (Sutlej, Beas, Rabi, Chenab and Jhelum) that irrigated the land. The town is situated about a few kilometres away from Tanjavur in Tamil Nadu. Situated herein are the famous temples of Siva (Pranatharthihara) and Dharma Samvardhini Devi. In the seventeenth century there lived a pious Brahmin couple, Kakarla Ramabrahmama and Sittama belonging to Bharadwaj Gotra. Their ancestors had come from the Andhra region and had settled down in this town. Vina Kalashatthaya was a great musician and composer and had written the famous 'Yakshagaan'. Sittama had a very melodious voice and performed Keertans of Bhadrachala Ramdas. Ramabrahmama was a staunch devotee of Lord Ram. Thyagraja was the second child born in this family on 4th May 1767. Born of such gifted parents, Thyagraja was naturally an inheritor of both the musical and devotional qualities of his parents.

Thyagraja's elder brother Japesya was not very kindly disposed towards his younger brother and was annoyed, because of his brother's spiritual obsession and neglect of household duties. Sonthi Venkat Ramanayya taught music to Thyagraja. Thyagraja also studied the manuscripts on music from his maternal grand-mother to enrich his knowledge on the subject. His maternal grand-father, who had some influence at the court of the Ruler of Tanjavur, obtained rare manuscripts for his grandson. Thyagraja also studied Bharat Natya Shastra, Sarangdeva's Sangeet Ratnakara and Naradeeyam. According to legend, the great Rishi Narad himself came to him in the form of a Sanyasi and presented to Thyagraja a treatise 'Swararnayam' and then disappeared. Thyagraja with great devotion to chanting the name 'Ram' turned the beads uttering the Lord's name 96 crores times. It is said that as a result of this Sadhana, Thyagraja was blessed with the beatific vision of Lord Rama.

Thyagraja performed Keertans, singing the glory of Lord Rama. He also wrote two operas, 'Prahlad Vijayam' and 'Nauka-charitra'. They deal with the love and devotion of Gopis for Lord Krishna and their boat-cruising on the bosom of river Yamuna. The compositions are master-pieces of poetic excellence and bring out the spiritual treasures contained in the Puranas, Vedas and the Upanishads.

When Thyagraja was 35 years old, his wife died. His second wife, Parvati also died without leaving any issue. He gave all his paternal affection to his brother's daughter Sitamahalakshmi, who was married to Subbaramayya. In fondness for the uncle they named their child Thyagraja. He died at the early age of 35. The saint Thyagraja himself took Samadhi on 6th January 1847, at the ripe old age of 80 years. He left behind him a number of disciples, prominent amongst whom were Akappa Ayyar, Sunder Bhagvathar, Sabhapati Ayyar and many others who preserved for the posterity Thyagraja Krittis.

Every year on the Nirvana day of the saint, Thyagraja Aradhana is observed and musicians from all over gather to pay homage to the musician saint, as is done in the North

towards the great musicians Tansen and Vishnu Digamber Palushkar. The Aradhana festival lasts for a number of days. Special Pujas are offered at the Samadhi. Pancharatna Keertans are performed joined by many vocal musicians and those adepts in playing musical instruments.

C In the compositions of Thyagraja, one will find stress laid on the following themes:

1. Addressed to himself, i.e. his mind with a view to reform himself.
2. Songs addressed to Lord Rama.
3. Songs addressed to the common man for his uplift and spiritual education.
4. Narrating his own bitter experiences of life, so that others may benefit by them.
5. Bringing out forcefully the evils that have befallen humanity in Kali Yuga.
6. Singing the glory and grace of Saguna Brahma, or in a form dear to the devotee.
7. His compositions in Sanskrit, singing the glory of the Lord.
8. Dealing with the various modes of worship.

Thyagraja in his various compositions had brought out the various facets of devotion in the manner mentioned above. The transcendental God-head is immanent in the idols he worshipped. Lord Ram was for him the Parabrahman. Thyagraja's compositions are liked and sung by all and have united the various sections of the people of the South. His devout urge for seeking union with the Cosmic Lord and his unceasing quest form the under-current of all his compositions. He has poured out his heart in all his compositions. He has shown his own strifes, struggles, failures and successes for the guidance of his countrymen. As such some of his songs are autobiographical.

The musical legacy that he has left behind forms one of the richest heritages of the nation. His name will always be in the hearts of his countrymen and he will always be revered as a saint of the highest order.

## SRI NARAYAN BHATTATIRI

The famous temple at Guruvayur has an interesting legend describing the conditions under which it was built. Brihaspati is considered the teacher or Guru of Gods. He is personification of knowledge and wisdom. His disciple was Vayu or Wind-god, and is considered the 'prana-vayu' or the principle of breath. These two took the image of Lord Krishna in its form as a child reclining on a Vata leaf sucking his right toe. It was truly a sight for the gods. Brihaspati and Vayu took the image and looked for a place where it could be installed. They wanted it to be installed at a place as holy as Dwarka, where the Lord had spent his time manifesting His sport. They came to the Malabar coast at Rudra Teerth and there saw Lord Shiva and His consort Parvati waiting to welcome them. They advised the two to instal the image there itself. Brihaspati and Vayu worshipped the Lord and installed the idol at the indicated place. A temple was built by Vishwakarma, the architect of Gods in matchless beauty. The temple was therefore, called 'Guru-Vayur' after the 'guru' and 'vayu'. 'Guruvayurappan' is the Father of the creation and as the presiding deity is worshipped by all. The constant chant that goes on in the temple is 'Narayaneeyam', which is the gospel of Guruvayur. This song 'Narayaneeyam' was composed by the great saint Melapattur Narayan Bhattatiri.

It was in the village of Ponnani in the south Malabar that Narayan Bhattatiri was born sometime in 1588. He lived upto the age of 56 and died in 1644 A.D. Narayan's father was a great scholar and the boy picked up the Shastras and other religious scriptures even as a child under the guidance of his father. He learnt Vedas from Sri Madhwacharya and Achuta Pisharodi. As he was struck down by an acute rheumatic bouts, he came to Guruvayur in the hope that his cure lay there only. He was then 25-26. At the temple he performed severe penance and practised severe austerities and began composing 'Narayaneeyam'. His devotion knew no limits. He went on composing songs after songs in chaste

Sanskrit. When he completed the compositions, he saw the Lord Himself, when he wrote 'Agre Pashyami' meaning "I see the Lord before me". With that his disease left him completely.

'Narayaneeyam' won him universal love and fame. He was welcomed and honoured at the royal court. Around the year 1616 he wrote another famous work, 'Prakriya Saraswam' which is a renowned grammar text. 'Dhatu Kavyam' and 'Mahamayodayam' followed a little later. His other great works include 'Panineeya Pramanya', 'Sadhnom' and many others. He spent his last days worshipping Mukkolokai Bhagwati—the Mother of all worlds.

With the passage of time, as his name and fame spread, Narayan Bhattachari developed egoism and considered that no one could excel him. Meanwhile another humble devotee, Namboodri had written a book in Malayalam in praise of Lord Krishna. He came to Bhattachari to get his compositions corrected, as Bhattachari was regarded as a great scholar. The latter despised the poor versifier and turned him away with disdain saying that it would be profanity to place his compositions at the feet of the Lord as it was not in Sanskrit.

That very night, it is said, the Lord Himself visited Bhattachari and desired to see his compositions 'Narayaneeyam'. When this was done, many a grammatical error was pointed out on the authority of 'Kavyaprakash'. Bhattachari was crest-fallen. His ego was deflated as if a bubble had been pricked. After the Lord had vanished, Bhattachari realised that the stranger was none other than the Lord Himself. He went to Namboodri and fell at his feet and begged his pardon for having turned him down. True Bhakti was then realised by him.

### Narayaneeyam:

This consists of more than a thousand shlokas. It is a prayer for restoring physical health, but also points out the way for liberation from birth itself. The composition ends in 'Agre Pashyami'. In this treatise Bhattachari has taught that God is omnipresent and is immanent as well as transcendent. He rose to the great heights of Parabhakti or higher devotion.

Guruvayur is a very holy place and is visited by devotees from all over the country. 'Narayaneeyam' has also been immortalised due to its association with 'Guruvayarpuram'.

## POETESS SAINT AVAIYYAR

Not many know that Tamil is one of the oldest languages of this country. It existed more than four thousand years ago. Old Tamil literature is available belonging to 500 to 1000 years B.C. Even then it was fully developed and could compare well with any of the flourishing languages of any country in the modern times. It has depth, variation and was a suitable vehicle for expressing the loftiest ideas. Tamil Nadu as a country existed far beyond its modern frontiers. It has been established by geologists that the southern part of the country joined the southern tip of Africa upto Cape Camorin. Tamil as such had penetrated far beyond its modern boundaries.

Many civilisations like the Syrian or Assyrian, which had flourished centuries ago, have perished and so have the languages spoken then. Sanskrit has been recognised as a very old language and has been called the mother of many Indian and European languages. It has a very rich literature. Even then it has ceased to be the common man's spoken language today. Barring a few learned scholars, not many can understand the language today. Not so with the Tamil language. It is a living language even today. Old Tamil literature is rich due to its ancient literature which contains deep mystical truths. Two persons bearing the name 'Avaiyyar' are notable in this connection. Tiruvalluvar is widely known and famous as the author of 'Tirakkular'. He was a great philosopher, thinker and mystic. Avaiyyar was his contemporary. A second person of the same name belonged to seventh century A.D. and it seems, had assumed name of the first Avaiyyar, because of the fame and glory attached to it. The present story is about the second Avaiyyar.

Many legends have developed about Avaiyyar. Her purity of life, profound learning, spiritual achievements and her fame from the kings to the ordinary man, have all created distinct place for her in Tamilian hearts. It is said that Avaiyyar was orphaned at a very early age and a poet

undertook her guardianship. She was an extremely beautiful maiden and even many ruling princes aspired for her hand. She was only sixteen when offers started pouring in, but she refused them all politely. She wanted to be a servant of the people, as the literary genius in her had begun to manifest itself. Her god-parents were keen that she should not spurn these royal offers. Finally, it was decided that she should be married to a ruling prince of a neighbouring state. Avaiyyar was greatly upset and prayed to the Lord to come to her rescue. "Why, all this fuss is on account of my face and beauty? Make me ugly, fierce-looking, so that no one dares to look at me." It seems that the lord heard her entreaties and suddenly she looked like an old haggard woman. There was no youth or beauty in the outward form. What remained was a mere skeleton of bones with withered skin. No more were the offers for marriage and she was released from the continued approaches for marriage. She was now free to go about all over the country to sing glory of the Lord. She spread sublime knowledge to all who listened without any discrimination of rich or poor.

During her peregrinations she came across a couple. The husband finding her old, sick and destitute brought her home for offering her food and nursing. But the wife was a shrew and inspite of her husband's pleadings refused to entertain Avaiyyar or give her food and shelter. Avaiyyar heard the commotion in the house on her account and walked out inspite of the husband's entreaties to remain with them. In another instance she met a couple engaged in husbandry. The wife was a devoted woman, but desired that her husband should abandon farming and take up some government job. Both of them approached Avaiyyar and sought her counsel. Avaiyyar replied, "Listen my children. A tree standing by the banks of a river and service in the government are both unstable. No one can say when they will be lost. But agriculture or farming is an independent business, whose success depends on your own prowess."

Tamil region was divided into many small territories and was ruled by a number of chieftains. They were all eager that Avaiyyar should join their courts and live there. But she was

not willing to give up her independence and restrict her movements. She was willing to lead a poor man's life, spend her time amongst the poor and reside in huts with them. She wore clothes according to the people amongst whom she lived. She comforted them in their distress and illness. They treated her like the world-mother. She spent her old age amongst them serving them always.

Avalyyar has written many religious books. Even today in many homes, these are read regularly. Her famous books are 'Aattichhudi', 'Konrai Ventan', 'Ulakneeti', 'Muturai', 'Nalavali', 'Nannery', 'Nitineri Villakham', 'Niti Venva' and 'Aranericaram'. Some of these compositions are in short aphorisms, some in poems and some in other metrical forms. A few specimens given below will bring out the value of these writings:

#### **'Aattichudi':**

1. Do not speak in a manner that will hurt.
2. Love means surrender.
3. Think before you act.
4. Do not be egoistic.
5. Even a grain of a heap can sprout. Not the husk, But husk is necessary for grain. In the same way, a person may possess power, but it is of no use if not accompanied by suitable opportunities.

#### **'Muturai'**

6. Palm leaves are big, but they have no smell or fragrance. A flower is small, but its fragrance spreads all round. The same applies to man. Do not judge a man by his size or position. Sea has so much water, but it is not fit for drinking or bathing. A nearby fountain or river is more suitable for the purpose.
7. Do not use harsh words that hurt. They are no solution for quelling harsh words. An arrow may hurt a mighty elephant, but can cause no harm if shot at a bundle of cotton. A rocky pit of a mountain

does not yield to constant digging, but allows even small plants to sprout.

**'Nalavali':**

8. A person may be extremely virtuous; a wicked person sees only his faults. An orchard may be laden with fruits and flowers, with bee-hives here and there; a crow however, looks for Neem fruits only.

**'Nanneri':**

9. When you dig a pond, you have to construct containing walls. But the sea requires no such protection. Those who look for recognition and praise are like the ponds. The wise and prudent need no such props.

**'Nitineri Villakham':**

10. What is youth? It is like a bubble of water. What is wealth? It is like the waves of an ocean. The body lives for a very short span and perishes like writing on a sheet of water. My brothers, why do you not therefore, devote yourself to the service of God?
11. Who should be called a pious and just king? Only he who does not rely on the information gathered by his spies, but investigates truth for himself. Truth is often concealed and can only be uncovered by diligence. A just king finds out the real truth and takes action only when he is convinced that whatever appears superficially may not be the reality but something else.
12. Who is a good minister? Only he who advises the king without fear or favour. A wild elephant also heeds the Mahout.
13. When the mother dies, one loses the delicacies she prepares. When the father dies, education is interrupted. A brother's death is like severing of an

arm. But when the wife dies, the entire home is uprooted.

14. A king's court is adorned by the presence of learned men. But the glory of a house is only due to good sons.

#### 'Niti Venna':

15. For marriage of his daughter, the father looks for an educated boy, the mother after his financial status. But the girl looks for his good looks and handsome appearance only.
16. For charity, the great people give more and expect to receive less. But the small people expect to receive more and give less in return.

#### 'Arnericharam':

17. O King, all the wealth remains behind when a person dies. His near and dear ones accompany the dead body upto the cremation ground. Only good name and deeds remain behind.
18. Why wait to perform good deeds and service towards others till one becomes rich! It is like waiting to take bath only after the rolling waves have stopped. May be that wealth may not remain always. Man must discharge his obligations towards his fellow-men without any delay.

There are numerous such quotes of Avaiyyar which are exchanged in Tamil Nadu today. The poetess saint has left deep imprint on the culture and civilization of the people of that region.

## BHADRACHAL RAMDAS

Gopanna, who later on was called Bhakta Ram Das, composed songs full of intense devotion for Lord Sri Ram and became a household name in Andhra Pradesh, because of their simplicity and direct appeal in Telugu. Other southern regions also hold them in high veneration. The Keertans composed by him are sung in musical concerts and hummed in homes. They are sung by simple village folks, because the songs have such a direct appeal that Lord Ram becomes someone very personal and dear. Rama is addressed as a friend, saviour, lord and God. As such the songs show a depth of devotion previously unknown. The philosophy put forth is that all is Ram and Ram is all. Everything belongs to Him and He permeates everything in this world.

Ram Das was born at Nalakondapalli, in the Khamman district of Andhra Pradesh. His parents were poor, but pious people. The father Kancharla Linganna and mother Kamamma were simple, but God-fearing. They called their son Gopanna and later on Ram Das, because of his devotion to Lord Sri Ram. Even as a child Gopanna was fond of singing Bhajans. He was married to Kamala. Once the wellknown saint Kabir was visiting the border towns of Tamil Nadu and happened to come to Nalakondapalli. Gopanna was so moved by the saint's appearance and philosophy that he fell down at his feet and begged to be initiated with an appropriate Mantra. He was given 'Ram Mantra' and Gopanna took to chanting the mantra continuously. He was then called Ramdas.

Sant Ramdas was in the habit of feeding the poor and looking after their needs to the best of his abilities. He was thus always in financial difficulties. His maternal uncles Akkamma and Madanna were Ministers at the court of the ruling Nawab of Golconda. Through their influence, Gopanna was appointed Tehsildar of Bhadrachalam situated on the banks of river Godavari. His duties were to collect revenues. According to Ramayan, this place had been visited by Lord Ram, Sita and Lakshman during their exile in Dandakaranya.

The place was as such considered sacred and sanctified by the visit of the Lord. River Godavari was also considered a holy river, where the three—Ram, Sita and Lakshman had bathed during their sojourn. A small shrine was situated on a hillock where idols of Lord Ram, Sita, Bharat, Lakshman and Shatrughna were installed. Gopanna was very much attracted to this shrine and visited the place often to offer worship.

During the course of time, the temple had become dilapidated and needed immediate renovation and repairs. Lots of money were needed for the purpose. Gopanna had no money of his own to spend. But he had with him six lacs of rupees belonging to the Government collected by him as revenue. He appealed to Tanisha, the ruling Nawab of Golconda to use the money for renovating the temple. There was a delay in getting a reply; but anticipating the sanction, he went ahead and spent the amount for rebuilding the temple. When Tanisha came to know about this, he was furious and ordered immediate arrest of Ramdas. He was put in jail, tortured and even paraded on the streets as a mark of royal displeasure. This persecution continued unabated. Ramdas continued to sing the Lord's glory, but Tanisha remained unmoved. One night, he found that his bed-room was flooded with unusual light and then he found two persons in the room. On being asked who they were, they replied that they were the servants of Ramdas and had come to pay back the money. They counted the money in gold coins and asked for a receipt. They vanished from sight soon afterwards. Tanisha then realised that they were in fact Lord Ram and his brother Lakshman who had appeared before him. He counted the money and found that the last pie had been paid. He prepared a receipt, rushed to the prison house and handing over the receipt to Ramdas, released him at once and begged his pardon.

There are other such stories about Bhadrachal Ram Das. He composed songs narrating the entire incident and complained why Lord had allowed him to suffer in this way and why did He not come to his rescue earlier.

Songs of Ramdas have a terrific appeal and they touch the very core of the heart. Rama is both personal and impersonal. His name will always live in the hearts of the people.

## TARI GONDA VENKAMAMBA

Always immersed in devotion to Lord Krishna, Venkamamba led a very simple life. No definite information is available about her life, but her life-sketch can be constructed from the legends that grew about her and from other sketchy information from her contemporaries. Venkamamba or Venkamma was a contemporary of Ramkrishna Paramhans. The famous Sir C.P. Brown in this English-Telugu dictionary has however, recorded her year of birth as 1840. Krishnayya—belonging to Vashistha Gotra was her father and Mamgamba her mother. Tarigonda or Tarikund was the name of the village where Venkamma was born. Tarigonda is situated in the district of Chittoor near Madras. According to the prevalent custom her betrothal took place when she was only a child. She understood little about the ceremony. The name of her husband was Vankat Chalpati. This is clear from the epilogue to her famous Bhagwat Purana, that reads, "Shri Vats Gotriya Tungketi Kulotpanna Timayyasuta Venkata Chalpati's feet is dedicated."

Venkamma was a woman of extremely simple habits and had an independent mind of her own. When she was widowed, according to local customs, she should have shaved off her head, but she refused to do so. When the society began to criticise her action, she told her father, "Father, do not listen to these people. They are only concerned about worldly matters. Their views have no value and do not deserve to be taken note of. These hair have been given by God and why should they be taken off. The mind and behaviour should be above reproach and whether the hair are there or not makes very little difference." The father was certain about the purity of her character and decided to leave the matter to her discretion.

It so happened that the Mahant of Pushpagiri, the famous religious exponent, happened to visit the village. The members of the community brought to his notice the lapses of Venkamma and requested him to intervene in the

matter. The Mahant called her father and questioned him in the matter. He suggested that he better speak to Venkamma and persuaded her to fall in line with the social custom. Venkamma was produced before the religious head and she was given an order. Venkamma respectfully submitted, "Respected Swamiji, you are a world-class teacher. I cannot argue with you on religious matters. Kindly enlighten me which Veda or Shastra says that the head of a widow should be shaved. If her mind is pure and her behaviour above reproach, what harm is there if she does not shave her head or even wears ornaments. God has given the hair and to make a woman ugly by shaving would be an act of desecration. Kindly enlighten me on this point". Venkamma's outburst was in a way representative of the common feeling amongst women that the custom was a result of male chauvinism. The religious head was furious on hearing these ideas placed by Venkamma. He sent for a barber and had Venkamma's head shaved forcibly. Venkamma suffered immense shame and humiliation and moved by piety and devotion went to the nearby river for a bath. A miracle occurred and when she came out, everyone found that her hair were there, shining and radiant. The Mahant Venkatgiri and others were completely cowed down by what they saw. They went to Venkamma and sought her forgiveness.

Venkamma was a living example of what Swami Vivekanand had said about women, "Educate the women of India. Leave the course of action to them only. They should decide what is best for them. What reforms they want should be left to them. How and why do you think that their problems should be decided by you. They should have the freedom to take action whatever is necessary for them. What do I feel about widows or about women, should never be asked. Am I a widow, or a woman! Who are you to solve their problems. Women will themselves create conditions that are congenial to them. You should stop interfering into their affairs." Women have always suffered at the hands of Brahmins. Their tyranny to women is too well known to be described. Shastras, Puranas and even the Vedas have shown a point of view which is at once derogatory and discriminative.

Exceptions may be there and the protagonists will always quote such cases. But such persons were very few. Society had framed rules which were unfair and made dismal distinctions between men and women. The reasons are very simple. The rules were framed by men only.

Venkamma was at a loss to understand the reasons for this miracle, but it helped to increase her devotion towards God. She was soon initiated by Rupavataram Subrahmanyam Shastri. Rupavataram lived in Chittoor district in Madanapalli. He was a famous person. In her book 'Venkatachal Mahatmya', Venkamma has expressed her devotion to her teacher in the following words: "I bow before the sacred feet of my Guru Subrahmanyam. It was he who showed to me that wisdom and Brahma are the same." She now wanted a secluded spot where she could continue her meditative Sadhana. She selected the local temple of God Narshingh (Man-lion). There was a temple of Hanuman also and she would sit there for hours and get lost in meditation. When she came out of her Samadhi, she would take some food just enough to keep her alive. Once the temple priest saw her there. He spoke to her harshly and asked her to go away. She left not only the temple, but her village also and proceeded towards Tirupati. She had great devotion towards Vyankateshwar. In her book, 'Vyankatesh Mahatmya', she had written about the glory and sacredness of this place. The book describes in a vivid language the remarkable beauty of the place, ashram, beautiful and natural surroundings and the flora and fauna that grew near the place adding beauty to the natural surroundings. Tirupati was then known by the name Vyankatachalam. It was a famous place for pilgrimage and was visited by thousands of devotees. Venkamma reached the place and had darshan of Vyankateshwar. Now she wanted a secluded place where she could continue her meditation. The local priests and officials were highly impressed by her piety and devotion and allotted to her a small place in a corner of the huge temple itself. Arrangements were also made to provide her enough rice to keep her going.

Venkamma sought permission to be allowed to decorate the Lord's idol. This was given and even today, the same

system exists. For some time everything went well, but then again troubles started, because of certain misunderstandings. She was once again made to suffer. She left the temple premises as she found another secluded spot where she continued her Sadhana undisturbed. The place selected by her excelled in natural beauty. The surrounding mountains, starstudded sky by night and the musical notes of birds with their beautiful plumes gave the place a divine appearance. Naturally all this has been reflected in the writings of Venkamma.

In this place, Venkamma lived for nearly six years. She achieved self-realisation and discovered her identity with the Lord she adored. She then commenced her life in a solitary hut by the side of the famous Swami-Pushkarini lake. She continued her Sadhana there and then began to spread her message to the world through her writings. She was convinced that if people of Andhra have to be given lessons in spirituality, it should be done in a very simple and straight-forward way, so that it could be followed or understood by common man. For moral education no rhetorics or pendiatic approach was required. Her approach was thus entirely different from many other scholars and writers, who wrote with the object of pleasing the rich in the society, so that they could earn much through their writings. At the end of her famous work, 'Vashishtha Ramayan' she has written, "O Lord Vyankateshwara, it is You who appeared as Narsimha Avatar at Tarigonda. To Your divine feet I dedicate this book." She further adds, "All those who will follow the precepts contained in this book will cross the ocean of life happily and certainly."

Venkamma's works are mostly poetical though the metre has changed in different styles. She has given a list of her works toward the end of 'Bhagwat Purana'. But even after this work, many more books have been written. 'Venkalachal Mahatmya', 'Vashishtha-Ramayan' and 'Raaj Yoga Saar' have already been published.

'Vashishtha-Ramayan' in its original text is a famous work and contains gems of high moral teaching. They have

been rendered easier to understand by Venkamma. Many of the compositions of Venkamma have become popular folk-songs. Famous commentators like Prabhakar Shastri and other Telugu writers have highly commended Venkamma's works. The spontaneity of expression, exuberance of devotion all appear God-inspired. In her book, '*Venkatachal Mahatmya*', she says, "As a child I never had any formal schooling. I had no guidance for writing or expressing my thoughts in verses. I have never read the well recognised books or literature. I sing the Lord's glory in the manner of playing a one-stringed instrument. I merely play. The tune and the words are the Lord's. It is His inspiration. Nothing is mine." This is what she says in one of her compositions; (Free hand translation):

"On a sacred day in the afternoon, Devi Sharada appeared before me and I had darshan of the primordial man and my Guru, Devi Sharada was very kind to me and through her kindness I found I could express my thoughts in verses..."

It is said that she had certain mystic powers and performed miracles also. But she never mentioned about them. On the contrary, this is what she says in '*Raaj-Yoga Saar*':

"People follow different practices of Yoga. Mantra-Yoga, Hatha Yoga and Laya-Yoga are their practices. To acquire mystical powers is their object. They travel far and wide and baffle the ignorant by their so called miracles. But this is not the real strength or achievement of a Yogi. The true saint is one who has found self-realisation. To discover the true identity in all life is their only goal. They seek the Ultimate Truth. They never go after giving common cure for the sick, or even afford relief from old age or death. The true saint never goes after these things."

*(Raaj-Yoga Saar)*

"Only those who have perceived the reality and do not go after things that are ephemeral, they are real god-men. They have got unshakeable faith in piety, truth and

purity. Their peace of mind is never disturbed and they remain quiet, harmonious and unruffled."

(*Venkatachala Mahatmya*)

"There stand four door-keepers leading to the Hall of Mukti or Release. They are a balanced mind, contentment, company of holy men and cogitation."

(*Vashistha Ramayan*)

"Yoga practices should be continued in an unbroken manner. Whenever there is a break in such practices, the mind is polluted with unholy thoughts. One becomes victim of anger, malice and such other vices..."

(*Raaj-Yoga Saar*)

In all Indian books on philosophy and religion, no one has shed so much light on Yoga-Vashishtha as Venkamma has done in her work '*Yoga Vashishtha Saar*'. The central idea in the original work has been brought to the fore very cogently. Listen to what she says,

"Man has made God according to his own thoughts, he has sought to accord wholeness to God. He has sought to bring the Light that illuminates. Our own actions are responsible to bring success or failure..."

Many of the problems and questions that humanity faces today can be solved by heeding the teachings of Venkamma. A great daughter of her state, an inspired writer, she stands out prominently amongst the great sages of this country who have left a deep impress on the social practices.

## SRI CHATTAMPI SWAMIKAL

Chattampi Swamikal, originally named Kunjan Pillai, was born on 25th August, 1853 A.D. in Kelloor, a village near Trivandrum in Kerala. He was fondly called Ayyappan. His father's name was Vasudev Sarma and mother was named Nagamma. The family was poor. Due to which Kunjan Pillai could not be sent to a school for his primary education. He began to learn the three 'Rs' only when he had become ten years old. There was a Brahmin Pandit who used to teach Sanskrit to boys. Fascinated, Kunjan Pillai watched the students while they were studying. The teacher was so impressed that he admitted Kunjan to his class as a student. Later on Kunjan joined a private school where Raman Pillai Asan of Thirumadhurapettali taught. Kunjan received his formal education at this school. At the school he showed qualities of leadership and as such the word 'Chattampi' was prefixed to his name. He had an enquiring mind and had a strong will-power. He practised Yogic exercises even as a boy. He began life as a very modest person and began to work as a coolie in the construction work going on in the Secretariat and then as a document writer in the Registrar's office. Later on he was appointed as an Accounts Assistant in the Secretariat, all due to his hard and dedicated work. He left this job also.

He now organised a movement called 'Gnana Prajagoram'. Many eminent persons were drawn to this movement. He learnt Hatha Yoga and then learnt philosophical texts from eminent scholars like Swaminatha Desikar, a well-known figure for his learning in Tamil Nadu. He then studied higher Vedantic philosophy from Subba Jati Padi at Kalladakurissi. Thereafter, he undertook a tour of various places in southern India. During his wanderings, he met Atmananda Swami of Marutwamalai and then practised advanced Yogic exercises. He also learnt much from another Yogi, Vadiveeswaram.

He returned home when he was about 27 or 28. After this, he met many learned and spiritually advanced persons

like Narayan Guru. He led an ascetic life, but did not wear any ochre clothes. He was however, regarded a person possessing many occult powers and as such his name and fame spread. He visited various places in Kerala and preached the philosophy of love and simple living. He could play with dexterity a number of musical instruments like Mridangam, Veena and Violin etc. It is said that he was an expert cook also. Kumbaletu Sanku Pillai, who was State President of the National Congress Party, became one of his disciples in 1923. Swamikal stayed in his house for a number of days. He also stayed in the compound of Sanku Pillai and chose this place for his Samadhi. The end came in the first week of 1924. A temple dedicated to the worship of Lord Shiva now stands where Swamikal took Samadhi.

Chattampi Swamikal was an erudite and versatile scholar. His writings include:

1. Pracheen Malayalam
2. Aadi Bhasha
3. Advaita Chinta Paddhati
4. Brahmatatvanirdesham
5. Adwait Panjaram
6. Chidakasalayom
7. Vedadhikara Nirupanam
8. Manonasham
9. Shareer Tatwa Samagraham
10. Oduvil Odukkum
11. Prapachthil Shree Purushanmarkulla Sthanam
12. Thamizhakom
13. Krishtumatha Nirupanam
14. Kristumatha Saram

Swamikal had a dynamic personality. He worked to bring about social equality and was determined to root out superstitious beliefs.

## SHRI NARAYAN GURU

Narayan Guru was one of the great savants and saints of our times. He had exemplified his teachings in his day to day life. He has left behind him a rich legacy for all to follow. He was a great poet-saint. Rabindranath Tagore made the following observations about him:

"I have been touring the different parts of the world. During these travels, I have had the good fortune to come into contact with several saints and maharashis. But I have to frankly admit that I have never come across one who is spiritually greater than Swami Narayan Guru of Malayalam, nay, a person who is on par with him in spiritual attainment. I am sure, I shall never forget that radiant face illumined by the self-effulgent light of divine glory and those yogic eyes fixing their gaze on a far remote point in the distant horizon."

Similar encomiums were paid to him by many contemporary illustrious persons like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Romain Rolland.

Narayan Guru was born on 20th August 1855 in Valayavaram House at Champazhanti about eight miles from Trivandrum. His father Madan Asan and mother Kutti Amma were both simple and holy persons. He was fondly called 'Nanu', a diminutive name of Narayan. Nanu had his early education under Champazhanti Mootha Pillai, who taught him classic texts like 'Amarkosh', 'Siddha Roopa', 'Balaprabodham' besides mathematics and other subjects. Nanu's uncle Kochu Krishnana Vaidyan also gave him important lessons. He also studied under Kummappallil Raman Pillai Asan of Kayamkulam, who was a great scholar. Later on he came under the influence of Chattampi Swamikal, who was an elderly saint of those times. Swamikal later on took him to Thycaud Ayyaswami Sastrikal. Under him he learnt to practise Yoga.

As a child Nanu showed great brilliance and mystical bent of mind. He showed great love for all creatures. After

completing his formal education, Nanu retired to solitary caves near Cape Camorin and practised deep meditation and severe austerities. The seclusion helped him to carry out introspection. He emerged from his seclusion a different man. Now he was considered a great spiritual leader, whose word was heard with great respect and attention. They reminded his listeners of the ancient wisdom which contains eternal truths. For fifteen years he traversed entire length and breadth of the country showing his audience the path of wisdom and light. His object was to begin a religious renaissance and enlightened reform amongst the people. Southern India was extremely caste ridden at this time and the bane of untouchability was at its height. Nanu was now reverentially addressed as Narayan Guru. He brought about a change in the outlook of the common man by his unique approach through love and affection, thereby breaking the barriers of casteism.

In 1880, Narayan Guru came to Arivippuram and installed an idol of Lord Shiva. In course of time this became a great centre of pilgrimage. All were permitted to visit the temple and offer prayers without distinction of caste, colour and creed. This was a unique experiment in respect of the so-called low-caste Hindus. Narayan Guru had the following inscriptions on the walls:

"Without difference of caste,  
nor enmities of creed,  
All live like brothers of heart,  
Here in this ideal place..."

The Guru gave the following two slogans to everyone:  
"Gain strength through organisation"  
"Gain freedom through Education."

Narayan Guru had a mirror installed in the last temple that he consecrated. It symbolised the teaching that man must look within himself, as God resides there in the shrine of his own heart.

Shri Narayan Dharmaparipalana Yogam (SNDP) was founded in 1903 for the uplift of the down-trodden and the

low-caste. Sivagiri at Varkala became the centre of SNDP. At Sivagiri, Swami Narayan Guru founded the Sharda Math. Branches of SNDP also exist in U.S.A. Swami Guru's life's mission was emancipation of the down-trodden. He founded a number of temples and institutions for helping this neglected segment of society. He was a great scholar of ancient scriptures including Vedas and Shastras. He expounded his philosophy demolishing the practice of untouchability with great force and with suitable quotations from the scriptures. He composed a large number of poems in Sanskrit and Malayalam, as also Tamil and has left behind him his thoughts and philosophy for the guidance of posterity.

### **His Writings:**

In Malayalam and Tamil the following are his works:

1. Atmopadesha-Shatakam
2. Adwait Pradipika
3. Jnani Navaratna Manjari
4. Daiva Desakam
5. Jati Mimamsa
6. Anukampa Desakam
7. Jivakarunya Panchakam
8. Arivu
9. Indriya Vairagyam
10. Chitambar Ashtakam
11. Chit Jadangal
12. Sadashiva Darshanam
13. Nivritti Panchakam

His works in Sanskrit are as under:

1. Brahma Vidya Panchakam
2. Municharya Panchakam
3. Shri Narayan Smriti—A Dharma Shastra
4. Darshan Mala

Thus it will be seen that Narayan Guru had written on a variety of subjects. To understand him and his philosophy, it is essential to have a contemplative nature and not to indulge in hair-splitting or vain arguments and disputations. Swami Narayan entered Maha Samadhi on 20th September 1928. The Government of India issued a postal stamp to commemorate his life and teachings. Narayan Guru led an extremely simple but dedicated life and combined in himself scholarliness of Adi Shankara, simplicity of Ramkrishna Paramhansa and the crusading spirit of Swami Dayanand. He enjoined a catholicity of approach as is evident from the following:

"Whichever the religion,  
It suffices if it makes a better man"  
"Acts that one performs for one's own sake  
Should also aim the good of other men."  
"One in kind, one in faith,  
One in God is man  
Of one same womb, one same form,  
difference none there is at all."

Narayan Guru's sermon, in a nutshell was:

"Devoid of dividing walls  
of caste or race  
of hatred or rival faith,  
we all (should) live here  
in (true) brotherhood."

## BHAGWAN RAMAN MAHARISHI

Venkatraman, later known as Raman Maharishi, was born on 30th December 1879, Arudra Darshan Festival day. He was the second amongst the three sons of Sundaram Aiyer, a pleader at Tiruchuzi. He had his primary education in his native town and then studied at Dindigul for about a year. When he was twelve, his father died. The family then moved to Madurai under the care of his uncle. Here he first studied at Scot's Middle School and then joined the American Mission High School. The famous temple dedicated to the worship of Meenakshi is situated at Maduari. When Venkatraman was sixteen, an elderly relative came to his uncle's house and narrated the glories of Tiruvannamalai. He spoke about the sacred shrine situated there and of the holy range of mountains where the Kartik Deep is lit annually amidst great devotion.

The description of the holy place thrilled Venkatraman and he began to have a strong fascination for Arunachala. After the relative had gone, Venkatraman chanced to read Sekillar's 'Periya Puranam' which contains the biographies of 63 famous Tamil saints. The Puranam had a deep impact on the young boy and he yearned to reach the same heights as attained by these saints. In this connection, it would be very revealing to read what the saint has himself written:

"It was in 1896, about six weeks before I left Madurai for good (to go to Tiruvannamalai) to Arunachala, that this great change in my life came. I was sitting alone in a room on the first floor of my uncle's house. I seldom had any sickness and on that day there was nothing wrong with my health; but a sudden violent fear of death overtook me. There was nothing in my state of health to account for it, nor any urge in me to find out whether there was any account for the fear. I just felt that I was going to die and began thinking what to do about it. It did not occur to me to consult a doctor or any elder or friend. I felt I had to solve the problem myself, then and there. The shock of the fear of death drove my mind

inwards and I said to myself mentally, without actually framing the words: 'Now death has come; what does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies.' And at once I dramatised the occurrence of death. I lay with my limbs stretched out still as though *rigor mortis* was setting in and imitated a corpse, so as to give reality to the enquiry. I held my breath and kept my lips tightly closed, so that no sound could escape, and that neither the word 'I' nor any word could be uttered. 'Well then' I said to myself, 'that body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of the body, am I dead? Is the body 'I'? It is silent and inert, but I feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of the 'I' within me, apart from it. So I am the spirit transcending the body. The body dies, but the spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death. That means that I am the deathless Spirit. All this was not dull thought; it flashed through me vividly as living truths which I perceived directly almost without thought process. 'I' was sounding real, the only real thing about my present state, and all the conscious activity connected with the body was centred on that 'I'. From that moment onwards, the 'I' or Self focussed attention on itself by a powerful fascination. Fear of death vanished once for all. The ego was lost in the flood of Self-awareness. Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that moment. Other thoughts might come and go like the various notes of music, but the 'I' continued like the fundamental 'Shruti' note that underlines and blends with all the other notes."

The above experience lasted for barely half an hour, but thereafter, Venkatraman lost all interest in his studies, friends and relatives. There was a visible change in his behaviour. There was evident an attitude of humility, tolerance and detachment in matters pertaining to others. There was a remarkable change in his attitude towards the Meenakshi temple. He now developed a feeling of reverence and visited the temple daily and spent long hours in front of the idols.

Six weeks after he had the spiritual experience, on 29th August 1896, an incident occurred which completed the process. While he was doing his lessons on grammar,

assigned by his teacher, he felt a strong revulsion towards reading and went into meditation. His elder brother, who was watching took him to task for this act of negligence. Of the five rupees he had, to pay as his College fees, he took three and left behind the remaining two with a note addressed to his brother that he was leaving the house in search of God as the studies interested him no more.

On 1st September 1896 he reached Tiruvannamalai. 'Tiru' means 'holy' and 'vanna' means 'light' and 'mala' means 'mountains' and therefore, Tiruvannamalai signified 'the hill of blazing light'. He was thrilled at the sight of the Shiva temple. He threw all his clothes in the nearby lake and just kept a loin-cloth. He entered the 'mandapam' of the temple and sat there in meditation. But there was too much noise there and so he retired to the underground room where there was complete seclusion. He observed all austerities and penance for the next three years and maintained complete silence. He was now a fully awakened person. When his mother and brother came and persuaded him to return, he never opened his mouth and just wrote on a piece of paper, 'Prarabdha karma" has to take its course." The family members had to return disappointed.

Ganapati Muni, who was a holy man, began addressing him as 'Bhagwan'. This appellation stuck to him and he began to be called Bhagwan Raman Maharishi. For twenty years or more Raman Maharishi lived in the caves of Arunachala hill as a lonely hermit. Later on Raman Ashram was founded and he lived there for about twenty-eight years. But he maintained his silence and opened his mouth on very rare occasions. He communicated with his disciples through silence as he had mastered the technique of operating on a higher plane of consciousness. F.H. Humphrys, a police officer at Vellore and an Englishman later on wrote, "...The Maharishi is a man beyond description. In him, there is expression of dignity, gentleness, self-control and strength of conviction."

His devotees built a small room called Skandas'iram and he would retire there for meditation. The cave associated

with his penances was later called Virupaksha cave. His mother came to stay with him in 1916 when his brother and others passed away. She lived in the Ashram like any other inmate. She died in May 1922. The body was cremated at Pali Teertham. Six months after his mother's death Raman Maharishi came to live near his mother's Samadhi. The present Ramanashram was founded at that place at the foot of the hill. Over the Samadhi, a small temple was built in 1949 and called 'Temple of Matribhuteshwar', meaning the 'Lord in the Form of Mother'.

Raman Maharishi made no distinctions of caste, colour or creed. He was extremely fond of animals. Cows, dogs, birds and monkeys were all his pets and lived in the Ashram. He took personal interest in their welfare. At the age of seventy-one the Maharishi became a victim of cancer, but he never seemed to be worried about the disease of the body and allowed the illness to run its full course. On 14th April, 1950 Friday, the end came and while chanting of Bhajans and hymns was in progress, the saint merged into Eternal Reality—the Arunachala Shiva.

Raman Maharishi believed in the Adwait philosophy with its aim as self-realisation. The central teaching of the Maharishi was to enquire about the 'I' which on being realised opened all doors to knowledge and wisdom, creating thereby new and enlightened perceptions. One will then know that the body is not 'I' and the real 'I' is indestructible. All fear of death will then automatically vanish. Raman Maharishi was a real Maharishi and Jnan-Yogi.

Raman Maharishi wrote metaphysical compositions and devotional songs. He also wrote essays such as 'Self-Enquiry' and 'Who am I'. They are collections of the Master's teachings to two of his disciples. Among his poems are his 'Forty-verses', 'Updesha Sara' and various hymns in praise of Arunachala. He also translated into Tamil works of Adi Shankara. Raman Maharishi was famous for his benign and meaningful looks. Paul Brunton in his book 'Search of Secret India' describes his experiences very vividly when he says that after the Bhajans were over, all other devotees had

left and he remained sitting leaning against a pillar. The Master was looking at him and then Brunton began to recall all about his journey to India, various people he had met and the experiences he had, when he suddenly realised that the Master had pierced his innermost thoughts and he was narrating to him in a silent language all that he had to say. Here is a famous stanza of the Master's 'Hymn to Arunachala':

"The strumpet mind will cease to walk the streets if only she find Thee.

Disclose Thy beauty then and hold her bound  
O Arunachala."



## 5.

### **ADWAIT, DWAIT, VISHISHTA DWAIT AND SHUDH DWAIT**

All these systems have emanated from the main philosophy contained in Sankhya-Darshan. What is Darshan? The six Darshans are called Shat Darshan Shastras. 'Darshan' literally means "Drishyate anain Iti Darshanam", i.e. the Shastra which shows the way and through which one can see. 'Shastra' means 'to make clear or describe'. It is also called 'science'. Thus the six or Shat-darshanas are in fact 'the science of life'. The word 'philosophy' is formed of two words, 'philos' meaning 'love' and 'affection' and 'sophia' meaning 'knowledge'. Heroditus used this word for the first time. Plato said that "philosophy begins in wonder". Of all the six Darshan Shastras, the one declared by Kapil Muni and known as Sankhya system is very important. According to this Yoga, the object of man's life is to put an end to all pains. For freedom from pain is the only real freedom. The object of life, namely cessation of pain cannot be achieved by means of any course of action. It can be achieved only by actionlessness or renunciation of all action. According to this system of philosophy emancipation can be attained by cessation of their 'prarabdha-karma'.

Sankhya Shastra or Yoga is called atheistic. Inspite of this it has given fresh ideas about the mode of creation, the creator, the visible and the invisible. Max Muller says, "Where ever there is an attempt of Psychology or Philosophy,

the great father of it, is this man Kapila." According to Swami Vivekanand Sankhya is the basis of the philosophy of the whole world. It is said that this Yoga Shastra was written in 8th century B.C. The important work that throws light on this Shastra is Ishwar Sagar's 'Sankhya-Karika'.

The philosophy postulates existence of 'Purusha' and 'Prakriti' or Spirit and Matter. There may have been an agency that gave existence to these two, but thereafter, 'Prakriti' or Moola Prakriti with the interplay of 'Purush' has brought into existence the whole world of creation. Purush is by itself inert, but when it is encased in various sheaths of Prakriti it creates 'Vikriti'. Prakriti or Matter has three qualities, viz., Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic. They are present in everything, animate or inanimate. One of these predominates and the matter then takes new forms according to the Purush or Spirit that is encased in Matter. In this Darshana-shastra, Purush is also called 'Kevaia'. Knowledge is gained by 'Pratyaksha' or direct perception, Inference or 'Anuman' and 'Shabda' or Word i.e. the ideas handed down by highly evolved Rishis and saints. Man can get peace and happiness through (i) Viveka or Discrimination, (ii) Vairagya or Dispassion and (iii) Dhyan or Meditation.

Sankhya postulated the existence of twenty-five principles that go to form Prakriti. They all originated from 'Mahat Tattva'. The foundations of the philosophy of Shankara, Ramanujacharya, Madhwacharya and Vallabhacharya grew out of the thoughts propagated by Sankhya Shastra with some modifications and variations. These are discussed below:

### **Adwait**

This should be read as A-Dwait i.e. non-dualism. In this sense it should not be termed as 'Monism' or Monistic theism. It postulates the 'Param Brahman' as the Supreme Unmoved Mover, the Causeless Cause. It has no attributes. It is formless, final and supreme energy. It is in Itself inert. When It limits Itself, it becomes Saguna Brahman or Ishwar or Purusha. This Purusha then creates a phantasmogoria or

illusive forms called 'Maya'. Some consider this Maya as real as Sankhya does, but the Adwait thinkers consider Maya as unreal and transient. This view was systemised by the 'Incomparable' Shankaracharya. Gaudpada, his guru Govinda's Guru, first wrote a commentary on this subject. It was placed on a firm footing by Shankar. The Sankhyas postulated that Jivas were but the product of One Purusha or Creator. There were innumerable Jivas and as such there were equal number of Purushas, who in association with myriad items of nature took various forms. Prakriti or Nature played with Purusha in creating the numberless forms. Shankar opposed this idea and stated that the Purusha was one and in being encased with matter appeared in many forms which were unreal and thus liable to end or disintegrate. Both the systems however, believed in the three Gunas or qualities of matter.

The Supreme Brahman is neither matter nor spirit and is beyond definition. That is why It is described as 'Neti, Neti' i.e. It is neither this, nor this. The Adwaits hold that an external object is merely the product of our mental states. Prakriti is nothing more than illusion and Purusha is the only reality; it is the one existence that remains in the universe of ideas. This is the Parabrahman of the Adwaits. Even if there were to be a personal God with anything like Upadhi (physical basis of whatever form), from the standpoint of an Adwaitin there will be as much reason to doubt his noumenal existence as there would be in the case of any other object. When it is realised that this grand universe is in reality but a huge aggregation of various states of consciousness, they will not be surprised to find that the ultimate state of unconsciousness is considered as Parabrahman of the Adwaitins. The same view has also been propounded by Heckel in his book '*The Riddle of the Universe*'.

If a Vedantic Brahman was asked whether he believed in God, he would say, "I am God". In this context the famous statement made by Bhagwan Shri Sathya Sai Baba is worth quoting. When asked if he was God, Swami said, "Yes, I am God. You are also God. The only difference is that I know this truth and you do not". The Parabrahman is absolute and

attributeless, but It's emanation 'Ishwara' is not, as It functions with Its Upadhi Prakriti. It is called Maya or illusion as the form changes, but not the Spirit which is encased in that form. Spirit belongs to the noumenon, whereas Prakriti belongs to phenomenal. Mahat is the first-born of Pradhana (undifferentiated Substance or the periodical aspect of Mool-prakriti, the Root of Nature).

The protagonists of all the schools of Adwait, Vishita-Dwait, Dwait and Shudhadwait, have their moorage in the Brahma Sutras or Vedant of Badrayan. All of them wrote commentaries on Brahman Sutras and interpreted them in their own way. The commentaries are called Bhashyas and show the different angles from which Truth has to be perceived. The Sutras are short Aphorisms. The Bhashya by Shankaracharya is considered very authentic and worthy of serious study.

To recapitulate the philosophy of Adwait, it must be stated that there are four important concepts: One being the concept of nature or Prakriti or matter and three of Spirit or Purusha. Prakriti as Maya. Though the external world is termed unreal, it is not chaotic. From the empirical point, it is a cosmos and Shankara has called it spatial, temporal and of casual order. Though it is undergoing changes all the time, it involves a persistent element and thus there is unity in diversity. In this case the diversity is latent, whereas in the other it is manifest. This explanation is similar to the one given in Sankhya Yoga. But at this point there is a slight difference in the two view points. This is in regard to the relationship between the two viz. Spirit and Matter. Whereas Sankhya Yoga does not explain this very satisfactorily, the Adwait philosophy clearly postulates that there cannot be any relationship at all between these two entities. Whatever may be said in support of a relationship, Shankara calls it false relationship. In the preamble to the commentary on the Vedant Sutra, which is rather too brief, he says that "the self or 'I' element is opposed to the 'Not-self' and they are never predicated to each other". According to him, the physical world is only an appearance. Its causal phase viz. Prakriti is also, therefore, false or in Adwaitic phraseology it is 'other than real and unreal' or 'sadasadvilakshana'.

The spirit, which is the ultimate basis of everything, is what Brahman or the Adwaitic Absolute signifies. Whatever reality Prakriti manifests, is derived from Brahman. In other words, the world is not a part or phase of Brahman, but an appearance thereof. Thus, whereas Maya is undergoing changes in the process of manifesting the world, the Brahman remains changeless. It is therefore said 'Neti, neti' i.e. 'not this, not this' and is devoid of any qualities or features i.e. 'nirguna'. The third postulate is 'Saguna Brahman'. If we choose to look upon the universe as a result of the combination, or as the cause of the universe or together constituting the source of the world, their blend or combination becomes what is known as 'qualified Brahman' or 'saguna'. When Brahman descends to the phenomenal world, it is then called 'apara' Brahman, whereas it still remains unaffected as 'Para Brahman'. This has been vouchsafed in Geeta also by Lord Krishna. The qualified Brahman thus becomes God or Ishwara of the Adwaitins. He is represented as a cosmic parallel to the finite individual self, the distinction between them being entirely of the adjuncts. The fourth concept is about 'Jiva'. Like the qualitified Brahman or God, Jiva is also a complex being, a blend of the self and not-self. The latter element is 'avidya', which corresponds to Maya in the case of qualified Brahman. It is the individual's share of Maya or Maya in miniature.

Thus according to Adwait, the goal of human life can be deduced from the explanation of the self. The individual self is Brahman itself and its supposed distinction from it is entirely due to the illusory adjuncts with which it identifies itself. Man's ultimate aim should be to realise this truth. Realisation of this truth already exists, but it is eclipsed by 'agyan' or 'avidya'. The Adwaitins speak of 'Vairagya' or Detachment and 'Gyan' or Knowledge as the two disciplines to be cultivated.

### Vishishta Dwalt

Let us now turn to 'Vishishta-dwalt' philosophy of Ramanujacharya. He attempted to synthesize Vaishnavism with Vedanta. He was vehemently opposed to Shankara's

Adwait and assailed it tooth and nail. Yamunacharya had preceded him and criticised vehemently Shankara's philosophy, but he failed to systemize the alternative. It was left to the genius of Ramanujacharya to accomplish this work. He has left behind him his commentary of the Vedant Sutras, known as 'Sri-Bhashya'. His many other works include commentary on Geeta and 'Vedarth-Sangrah'. There is difficulty in interpreting Upnishads in reconciling statements that identify Brahman with the individual self. Bahrtraprapanch and Shankar attempted to do so, but Ramanujacharya in a very masterly way tried to harmonize the two. According to him things are often identified with one another due to common linguistic usage. When it is said 'the rose is red', it is that rose is a substance, whereas redness is a quality. Or again when it is said, 'I am a man', it is forgotten that the 'I' is the spirit, whereas there is the 'body' which is mortal human coil. We do not speak of a man and his coat or his cap in this manner. Contrasting these two forms of usage, Ramanuja comes to the conclusion that the relation in the two former cases is different and more intimate than in the first case, i.e. between substance and its attribute and that between body and soul. This intimate relation is termed by him 'aprathak-siddhi' which means inseparability. The relation between Brahman and the soul is of the second variety, so that there is body of which soul is God. Ramanuja therefore postulates that according to Upanishadic teaching while Brahman, the soul and the physical world are all different, they are equally eternal. This then is 'Vishistadwait', mistakenly translated as 'qualified monism'. It emphasizes the point that of these three entities the inspiring entity is Brahman and the differences are merely synthesised. Soul and Matter are not identical with Brahman or with one another.

Ramanuja's philosophy is theistic. According to him, Ishwar or God is free from all faults and defects. He is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world. He appears in five different modes:

1. Para or the highest, in which mode Narayan, called also Parabrahman and Para-Vasudev lives in a city

called Vaikuntha. He is attended to by Sri, Bhya and Leela (Goddess Lakshmi, Earth and Sport).

2. Vyuh in which the Para has assumed four forms, viz. Vasudev, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha for conventional worship.
3. Vibhava which mode consists of the ten Avatars or Incarnations.
4. Antaryami in which mode he dwells in the heart and can be seen only by Yogis and accompanies the individual souls even when they go to heaven or hell.
5. Idols or images set up in the houses, villages or towns made up of materials chosen by the worshippers.

It is thus clear that Ramanuj derived his metaphysical doctrines from texts of Upanishads and the Vedant Sutras, while his theory about the creation of the world has been adopted from the Puranas and is based on the twenty-five elements of Sankhya philosophy. His Vaishnavism is the old Vasudevism of the Panch-Ratra system. Rama does not appear to be a favourite deity nor is the cow-herd form of Gopal Krishna or Radha ever mentioned. But in Ramanuja's philosophy Bhakti or devotion is continuous meditation of the Supreme Soul. It thus corresponds to the Upanishadic texts and Vedant Sutras of Badrayan. It takes cue from 'Bhagwat Geeta' also.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that though both Shankar and Ramanuja derived their inspiration from the Sankhya Yoga or Darshan as well as the Vedanta Sutras, the latter gave importance to a personal God or Ishta, for that alone could inspire Bhakti or devotion. The Bhakti was not ritualistic, but meditative in its form and content.

### Dwalt

Let us now turn to Dwalt philosophy as propounded by Madhwacharya. He was a Vaishnavite, whose one aim was to confute the theory of Maya or unreality of the world and

establish the doctrine of Bhakti or love and faith on a secure basis. Ramanuja tried to do this in his own way. The theory given in the Brahmasutras on the basis of Upanishads is that God is the material as well as the efficient cause of the world, whereas Ramanuja propounded the theory of God being a composite person having for his body the individual souls and the inanimate world. Madhwacharya, the propounder of Dwaita doctrine, objected to this view, as in his view it showed a tendency to deprecate the independent majesty of God, and therefore, he denied His being the material cause of the world. He accepted the Brahma-Sutras and interpreted them in almost a fanatic manner. In contrast to Shankar's Non-dualism and Ramanuja's qualified Non-dualism, Madhwacharya or better known as Anand Teerth postulates five eternal distinctions or individualities viz. (i) distinction between God and the individual spirit, (ii) God and the inanimate world, (iii) the individual spirit and the inanimate world, (iv) one individual spirit and another and (v) one inanimate object and another.

The Madhwas follow the method of Vaisheshikas and divide all existing things into categories of substance, qualities etc. God or the supreme self possesses an infinite number of qualities and his functions are eight viz. (i) creation, (ii) protection, (iii) dissolution, (iv) controlling all things, (v) giving knowledge, (vi) manifestation of himself, (vii) tying beings down to the world and (viii) redemption. Lakshmi is independent of God. She is eternal and blessed like the Supreme Soul and is his consort. All knowledge emanates from Paramatma, whatever the means by which it is acquired. Direct perception is possible for everyone and can be achieved by various means like Vairagya, equanimity, self-control, acquaintance with the lore, self-surrender (the mind is devoted to God), attendance on Guru or preceptor and acquisition of knowledge from him, reflection on what has been taught, devotion and love of God. Dwaita doctrine is simply theistic and identifies the supreme God with Narayan or as he is generally designated Vishnu. Madhwa earned the title of Poorna Prajna. He has left behind him commentaries on the main Upanishads, the Bhagwat Geeta and the Vedant.

Sutra. He postulated the view of Brahma Sutras and wrote a learned commentary thereon. He emphasized Upasana or worship which according to him was of two kinds: (i) the learning of Sutras and (ii) meditation. According to him meditation or Nididhyasan was placing Bhagwat before the mind's eye to the exclusion of everything else.

In conclusion it should be stated that the principal features of the doctrine are its belief in a personal God, which is identified with Vishnu, its realism and pluralism. The intimate association of God as embodied in the individual souls as well as matter as propounded by Ramanujacharya was unacceptable to Madhwacharya, who considered it as too intimate to be consistent with the majesty and glory of God. In this, Dwait philosophy resembles Nyaya-Vaisheshika. It also differs from it in some ways e.g. tracing the world to a single source, Prakriti. Madhwa's philosophy is realistic in the absolute sense. He propagated 'Yatharth-vada'. According to him the senses which help us to know, are seven and not five, Manas and Saksin are the remaining two instruments and through which things are known. The concept of 'Saksin' as the seventh principle is a distinctive feature of Dwait philosophy.

Ramanujacharya had been preceded by the twelve Alwars who were great devotees of Vishnu. Their compositions in Tamil had made a deep impact on the thinking of Ramanujacharya. In the same way Nimbark and other saints appeared and propagated Krishna Bhakti. Vallabhacharya belonged to the same class. His 'Ishta' was not the Krishna of Dwarka or the Yogeshwar who preached Geeta, but the cowherd boy of Mathura, Gokul and Vrindavan, who played on His divine flute and charmed the cowherdesses. Vallabha's Vedantic theory is the same as propagated earlier by Vishnuswamin. Vishnuswamin is said to be the son of a Dravidian chieftain, owing allegiance to the Moghal emperor at Delhi. Nabaji in his Bhakti says that Jnandev, Namdev, Trilochan and lastly Vallabh as Vishnumuni's successors. Vallabh's Vedantic theory is the same as of Visnuswamin and can be summarised as under:

## SHUDH ADWAIT

Sri Krishna is the highest Brahman. His hands and feet are celestial. His body consists of Sat (Existence), Chit (intelligence) and Anand (joy or bliss). Vallabhacharya, who was Nimbark's immediate successor, regarded the world and souls as identical in essence with Brahman called Krishna. He called his system Shudhadwait or pure non-dualism as opposed to Shankar's Kevaladwait, or simply Adwait. According to Vallabhacharya the question of the ultimate reality is not so much a question of reasoning, but of faithful interpretations of the Vedas. Vallabah has therefore, interpreted the various texts almost literally, whereas Shankar gave philosophical discussion about these texts.

Vallabhacharya has said about Brahman in three distinct forms: (i) Parabrahman or Purushottam, (ii) Antaryami and (iii) Akshar-Brahman. For him the world is real and no 'mithya' or false. The world of physical forms has emanated from the essential nature of God (swarup). All this is his 'leela' or sportive activity. He agrees with the Upanishads when they say, "All this is verily Brahman", and therefore, the objective world has emanated from a portion of Him and yet He does not suffer from any loss. It is the 'samsar' that is false and not the world. Vallabha postulates three distinctions amongst the souls: Pushti, Maryadah and Pravah. Those who worship God whole-heartedly and with complete self-surrender are dearest to Him and earn His grace. Those who worship Him as a result of study of the holy scriptures constitute the 'Maryadah' class. They who are always engrossed in sensual pleasures form the 'Pravah' class. The category of 'Pushtis' are further divided into four classes: Pravah-pushti, Maryadah-pushti and Pushti-pushti. Of course the last category are the highest. Vallabh fully recognised the value of Gyan, Bhakti and Karma. But Bhakti has been accorded the highest place. For him the Pushti-pushti conformed to the Bhakti as depicted in the Ras-leelas.

All in all, Vallabhacharya has made a signal contribution to the philosophical teachings of his time and had a number

of followers. Besides ordinary worship, followers of Vallabhacharya hold a number of feasts in honour of his son and seven grand-sons. Follow-of this system can be found amongst the trading community in Gujarat, Rajputana and near Mathura. According to Dr Bhandarkar, "Moral rigidity culminating in indifference to worldly enjoyments and self-abnegation does not appear to be a characteristic of this school. Vallabhacharya was himself a married man and so were all his successors and so are all the gurus of the sect, and are as much men of the world as their followers." This view is contestable.



## 6.

**SOME JAIN AND BUDDHIST WOMEN SAINTS**

Bhagwan Mahaveer had a very liberal attitude towards women. They were admitted to Jain organisation without any let or hinderance. The Order consisted of two classes of adherents. 'Arya' and 'Aryika', 'Shravak' and 'Shravika'. 'Arya' is a noble and respectable person and the females are 'Aryika'. Similarly, 'Shravak' means listeners or followers of religious precepts and the females are called 'Shravikas'. Jainism has two sects viz. Shwetambar and Digambar. Digambars do not consider women entitled to salvation or 'Mukti'. The Order therefore, prohibits admission of women to their organisation. There is no such bar to their admission by the Shwetambars. It is said that during the lifetime of Lord Mahaveer, the number of women adherents outnumbered their male counterparts. There were thirty-six thousand female followers as against fourteen thousand males. Chandana, who was Lord Mahavir's sister (on the mother's side), was chief of 'Aryika' Sangh and did yeomen service in spreading the message of Lord Mahaveer.

- (i) Marudevi was the mother of Rishabh-nath, the first Teerthankar. When she learnt that her son had achieved enlightenment, she came and visited him. She was so much impressed on beholding his radiance and spiritual glow that she fell and collapsed.
- (ii) Arya Chandana was a contemporary of Lord

Mahaveer. She was the first female chief of the Aryika Sangh and was an extremely religious person and much venerated.

- (iii) Jayanti was the sister of King Shataneek. She was always present to listen to the discourses by Lord Mahaveer. She discarded her royal robes and lived like a 'Bhikshuni'.
- (iv) Mrigavati was the beautiful queen of King Shataneek. She was famous as an example of extreme piety and valour. She played an important role when infatuated by her beauty, the neighbouring ruler Pradyota launched an attack. Mrigavati led her army as her husband was unwell and defeated the enemy. Many tales of heroism are narrated about her.
- (v) Yakini Mahattara was an extremely learned lady and a great scholar, sometime in the seventh century A.D. She defeated many learned Pandits in debates on spiritual matters and did much to propagate the philosophy of Jainism.

There have been other women saints also, who spread Jainism. It is noteworthy that whereas Buddhist Orders of women devotees have ceased to exist today, the same is not true of Jain 'Aryikas'.

Gopa was the wife of Siddharth Gautam. She had the highest respect for her husband and did not lose her composure when she found in the morning that her husband had left the palace while she was asleep along with her son Rahul. She suffered extreme anguish, but did not continue shedding tears. Siddharta Gautam performed extreme austerities and when he achieved enlightenment, he became a 'Buddha' from the stage of 'Tathgat'. He visited the capital of his old kingdom 'Kapilavastu' and received a very respectful and hearty welcome. Gopa was thrilled and eager to see and meet her husband. She called her son Rahul and suggested to him to go to his father and demand from him his inheritance. Buddha received him and then told his close disciple Anand to give to his son a begging bowl and the robes of a

mendicant and then set out for spreading the religion. Rahul obeyed the command.

Gopa was a close follower of Lord Buddha. Swami Vivekanand during one of his lectures remarks, "Lord Buddha's wife was his closest follower. Much of the credit for propagating the Buddhist religion should go to her."

Another woman devotee was Gautami also called 'Mahaprajapati'. She was the step-mother of Siddharth Gautam. She was the younger sister of Mayavati, Siddhartha's mother who died seven days after the birth of her son. Gautami was married to the king and had a son by him. But she nursed Siddhartha like her own son and instilled into him the rudiments of spiritual awakening. When Lord Buddha had attained enlightenment, Gautami approached and begged to be admitted to his Order, but Lord Buddha refused, as women had not been admitted to his Order till then. He ultimately agreed to do so at the intervention of close disciple, but laid down strict conditions which were accepted by Gautami. She was an ardent follower of the faith and did much to inspire many others.

Kisha Gautami was a poor woman and of a frail health. When her only son died of snake bite, she went to the Lord and begged him to bring back to life his son, who was her only hope and succour. Lord Buddha asked her to obtain some grains from a household and the son would be revived. There was one condition however, there should be no one dead in that house in the past. The poor woman went from door to door and to her surprise found that there was no such family. She then understood the truth and reported the matter to the Lord. But her ignorance had now given place to knowledge and she no more grieved for her dead son. The Lord said, "One who is born cannot escape death. You should not grieve because of this." Kisha Gautami became one of the devoted bands that served the Master.

### SUPRIYA

She was the daughter of a millionaire of Shravasti. She was brought up in very luxurious conditions. Much care

and attention was devoted to her education. It is said that she had the faculty of recalling the events of her past life. Once Lord Buddha during a visit to Shravasti was extremely unhappy to see the conditions of poverty which the people faced. Starvation deaths had occurred due to disease and pestilence. The Lord enjoined on his listeners to come to the aid of their brethren and contribute liberally for their welfare. While others remained silent, young Supriya came forward and offered substantial donations. Her words carried hope to the famine stricken and Lord Buddha patted her back and spoke encouragingly. He blessed her.

There were other women devotees who also acquired name and fame. Mention must be made of Pathachara, Amrapali and Sanghmitra. They were all great devotees of the Lord.

7.

## SUFISM OR MYSTICISM IN ISLAM

Islam is truly a much misunderstood religion in India. Our contact with the Islamic world was through the Muslim invaders whose one object was to carry away the riches and wealth of this country. They belonged to the clan of Chengiz Khan, Mohammad Ghazanavi and Mohammad Gori. The Moghal kings were enlightened persons. They intermingled freely with Hindus and took many queens from Rajput princes. This resulted in a synthesis of culture, thought and social manners. Akbar made sincere attempts to blend the two religious thoughts and fuse them into *Din-e-Ilahi*, an attempt which was rather too premature. Dara Shikoh, son of Emperor Shah Jahan and the heir-apparent was the most enlightened of the Moghals. He was a great scholar of Indian scriptures like the Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagwati Gita and under his patronage, these books were translated into Persian. The effect could not be lost, and found expression amongst the elite of the Muslim world. The new approach to God and His creation left its mark and the Muslim philosophers, while still owing allegiance to the Prophet and Koran, differed with others in their interpretation.

The word 'Sufi' is derived from 'Suf' meaning pure. Sufi thus signified purity and godliness. The saints who were called 'Sufis' were pure and broad-minded. They thus earned the appellation of 'Sufis' and the cult came to be known as 'Sufism'. There is however, another explanation.

The early Christian monks and saints were habitually clad in loose woollen garments and roamed about the country so dressed. 'Suf' also means 'coarse woollen garments'. The Sufis also were dressed in this manner and so came to be known as 'Sufis'. Whatever the truth, it is certain that "Christian and Neo-Platonic influence played an important part in the development of Sufism. But the starting point lay in the nature of Islamic piety... In its initial stages Sufism was primarily an other-worldly and quietest movement... Amongst the ascetics there emerged in course of time a specially mystical religion", (Sidney Spencer in 'Mysticism in World Religion').

The Sufis had many fraternities like the 'Chistis', the Suhawardi Order, the Qadiri Order, the Naqshabandi Order and some other minor fraternities like the uwaysi Fraternity, the Madar Order, the Shattari Order, the Qalandariya Order and the Malamati Order. Of these fraternities, the Chistis are well-known in India because of Moinuddin Chisti, whose great and majestic Dargah is situated in Ajmer, and then his successor Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia, whose tomb is at Nizamuddin in Delhi. There are many other Muslim saints whose tombs exist at many places and Urs are held to commemorate their lives. Urs means 'death anniversary'. Some of them held in this country are listed below:

1. Urs of Pir Gackwad is held in the district of Sangli in Maharashtra in Chinchani Vangin (February-March).
2. Urs of Sharissailani Shah Miya is held annually in the month of March-April at Pimpalgaon in Maharashtra (Buldhana district).
3. Urs of Hazart Lal Shah Baz Kalandar is celebrated in the month of March-April at Lengare in Maharashtra.
4. Urs of Hazrat Mujahid Alaf Saani is held in the saint's mausoleum in Sirhind, about eighty miles from Chandigarh.
5. Urs of Shah Hamdaan is held in the month of August-September in Kashmir. Shah Hamdaan was

a Persian poet and had visited Kashmir in the 4th Century. He died at Srinagar.

6. *Urs* of Khwajah Moinuddin Chisti is held annually at Ajmer. A brief sketch of his life is given in the book.
7. *Urs* of Zinda Shah Mandar is held at Manakapur near Kanpur. Many devotees visit the *Urs*.
8. *Urs* of Sheikh Ahmad Nujadid Alf-I-Saani is held for four days at his mausoleum called Roza Sharif near Fatehgarh (about 10 miles from Sirhind).
9. *Urs* of Banda Nawaz Chisti is held at the saint's tomb at Golbarga in Karnataka. He is called a Wali meaning 'sufi saint'. He died in 1432 A.D.
10. *Urs* of Qadir Wali is held in Tanjavur district in Tamil Nadu.
11. *Urs* of Shah Turab-Ul-Haq is held in Maharashtra at Prabhani. It is held for four days in the Muslim month of Ramzaan.
12. *Urs* of Pir Sayed Ahmed Ali Shah Qadri is held annually at Dongri near Bombay.
13. *Urs* of Shah Alam is held annually at the saint's mausoleum in Ahmedabad.
14. *Urs* of Hazra Kalimullah Wali. He was a 18th-century saint. His mausoleum is situated in Jama Masjid near Red Fort at Delhi.

The saints whose *Urs* are held were eminent saints and it is a tribute to their greatness that even after hundreds of years, devotees from all religions and communities attend the *Urs*.

The Sufis were thinkers and ascetics of the highest order. Their writings made a powerful impact on the current thought and though there was opposition from the orthodox school of Islamic religion, their doctrines were better

understood with the passage of time. Though it would be impossible to reconcile the transcendental powers of God (*Allah*) with the immanent Relity which is the life and soul of the universe, Islam has accepted Sufism and the Sufis instead of being excommunicated are firmly established in Mohammedan church and the 'Legend of Muslim Saints' records the wildest excesses of Oriental pantheism. The famous dictum of the Sufis, 'Anal Haq' meaning 'I am God' is a loud echo of the Vedantic philosophy, 'Brahmosmi' or 'I am Brahma'. Sufis were great Mystics and were always absorbed in the contemplation of God.

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## GLOSSARY

Anuman	Inference.
Ashram	A hermits place of residence where sometimes students are taught.
Avatar	Literally means descent. Hindus believe that God incarnates in human form. So far nine incarnations have taken place. The tenth has yet to appear.
Atman	Self or soul
Abhang	Short lyrical poems containing high metaphysical truths.
Brahmand	Universe or Cosmos.
Bhakti	Devotion. Surrender to God
Dharma	That which holds together.
Guru	Teacher. The Master who initiates a disciple and leads him to higher teaching.
Gayatri	Considered the most potent 'Mantra' and is an invocation to Sun-God.
Karma	Action. Deeds.
Kcertain	Stories narrated before big audiences about the deeds of Gods as contained in the mythological books, rendered through discourses and musical songs.
Kapaliks	Followers of black magic suppose to wear a garland of human skulls.

Puja	Worship. Adoration to God and deities.
Nakshattra	Constellations, or asterisms
Rishis	Great and highly evolved persons, or hermits
Sanyas	The fourth stage of human life when the world is renounced and all attachments are given up.
Tithi	The passage of Moon through Nakshatras. Days are reckoned from one tithi to another in a lunar month.
Upnishad	Secret or highly metaphysical teachings.

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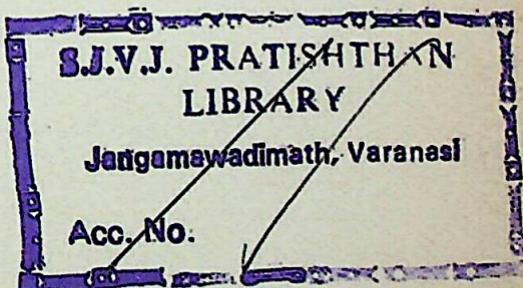
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